

NIETZSCHE, DEBUSSY, AND THE  
SHADOW OF WAGNER

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## ABSTRACT

### NIETZSCHE, DEBUSSY, AND THE SHADOW OF WAGNER

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Debussy was an ardent nationalist who sought to purge all German (especially Wagnerian) stylistic features from his music. He claimed that he wanted his music to express his French identity. Much of his music, however, is saturated with markers of exoticism. My dissertation explores the relationship between his interest in musical exoticism and his anti-Wagnerian nationalism. I argue that he used exotic markers as a nationalistic reaction against Wagner. He perceived these markers as symbols of French identity. By the time that he started writing exotic music, in the 1890's, exoticism was a deeply entrenched tradition in French musical culture. Many 19<sup>th</sup>-century French composers, including Felicien David, Bizet, Massenet, and Saint-Saëns, founded this tradition of musical exoticism and established a lexicon of exotic markers, such as modality, static harmonies, descending chromatic lines and pentatonicism. Through incorporating these markers into his musical style, Debussy gives his music a French nationalistic stamp.

I argue that the German philosopher Nietzsche shaped Debussy's nationalistic attitude toward musical exoticism. In 1888, Nietzsche asserted that Bizet's musical exoticism was an effective antidote to Wagner. Nietzsche wrote that music should be "Mediterraneanized," a dictum that became extremely famous in fin-de-siècle France. Nietzsche's influence on fin-de-siècle musical culture has not been examined in current secondary literature on French music. In my dissertation, I show that Nietzsche's dictum was widely discussed in the French press between 1893 and 1920. In periodicals from that time period, music critics such as Louis Laloy and Lionel de la Lawrencie contend that many French composers are following Nietzsche's dictum by writing exotic music. I aim to show that Debussy was one of the composers who followed this dictum. Influenced by Nietzsche's anti-Wagnerian view of exoticism, Debussy employed exotic markers as a nationalistic strategy of resistance against Wagner. In making this argument, my dissertation brings together three strands of Debussy's musical thought: nationalism, exoticism and anti-Wagnerism. Each of these strands has received previous scholarly attention, but scholars have not examined the links between them. My project demonstrates that Nietzsche gave Debussy the tools to combine these three strands in his compositions.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Tekla Babyak was born in Arcata, CA in 1981. She received generous funding for her undergraduate studies at UC Davis (BA, Music, 2003) from the National Merit Scholarship Program and a UC Regents scholarship, and was awarded the UCD Mayhew award at her commencement in 2003. Her graduate work at Cornell was funded by the Mellon Foundation fellowship, the Jacob K. Javits fellowship and the Cornell Sage fellowship. Her research interests include nationalism and exoticism in fin-de-siècle French musical culture and the French reception of Wagner. She is also interested in representations of music in literature and philosophy, particularly the works of Adorno, Nietzsche, and Kundera. In addition to her scholarly work on music, she is an accomplished pianist who has performed many of Debussy's works in concert.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am extremely grateful to my committee. My three committee members have shaped my intellectual life throughout the course of this project. Judith Peraino, the chair of my committee, has helped me enormously with the craft of writing. She has shown me how to unify and structure a large-scale argument. She has taught me techniques for developing my main points and building toward a convincing conclusion. She expertly guided me through the process of unfolding my argument, advising me to introduce my main points through a series of questions. Influenced by her useful suggestions, I structured my introduction around one of Debussy's works, *Soirée dans Grenade*, which I use as a vehicle for presenting my main points.

Annette Richards has given me an invaluable gift as well: she has taught me how to bring the past to life in all its glorious complexity. She has urged me to avoid sweeping generalizations about historical trends, such as Nietzsche's influence on French culture and the anti-Wagnerian movement in France. She has shown me the importance of engaging with all the nuances and contradictory strands inherent in each historical moment. Under her guidance, I have learned to listen to what the archives are telling me. Following her advice, I did extensive archival research, focusing on fin-de-siècle French periodicals. By opening my ears to the voices that

speak through these periodicals, I discovered Nietzsche's profound influence upon French musical culture.

While Annette was teaching me how to listen meaningfully to the "archival voices," David Rosen was teaching me how to listen meaningfully to the music itself. He has generously shared with me his expertise as a music theorist and analyst. Thanks to his help, I developed the necessary skills to analyze and codify the French musical vocabulary of exoticism. He has invested a great deal of time and energy in working through my analyses with me. For instance, he helped me to distinguish between structurally significant harmonies and decorative passing chords. He has taken the time to study all the musical works that I discuss and to develop his own insights into these works. I have benefited immeasurably from his insights, because he has modeled for me the process of analyzing a work and observing its significant features.

In addition to helping me with my academic work, my committee members have also offered me something equally important: friendship and support. I would like to thank them for giving me the opportunity to get to know each of them so well. I am grateful that they have let me into their lives in this way. I have many happy memories of meeting with Judith at local cafes and restaurants, discussing an array of topics, including the job market, pedagogical strategies for teaching undergraduate classes, and important issues in critical theory (we share an interest in interdisciplinary work).

I will always treasure my memories of having dinner with Annette and her husband David Yearsley. The convivial atmosphere and stimulating conversation

helped energize me for my dissertation work. Our conversations were wide-ranging; Annette and David shared witty anecdotes from their own graduate school days, we discussed our interests and collections, and we had intense discussions about philosophy. I was extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to TA for Annette in two music history courses. She was an incredibly helpful and supportive mentor. She gave me a thorough foundation in many important components of undergraduate teaching: writing lesson plans, leading class discussion, grading papers, designing assignments, and delivering clear, focused lectures. She shared with me her expert techniques for performing these duties, and she walked me through the steps for carrying out these duties myself. Her generous feedback helped me grasp the key points, as well as many subtle details, of undergraduate pedagogy.

I am also extremely grateful for my wonderful friendship with David Rosen. He and I took many walks around Ithaca, when the temperamental weather conditions allowed us to do so. Exploring the majestic Ithaca gorges, he and I debated about topics in music theory and musicology. It was like a scene from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century nature poem: we soaked in the beautiful countryside scenery as we pondered intellectual matters. David and I also met frequently for coffee on days when the snow and ice prevented us from hiking. We even traveled to conferences together on two occasions (chapter meetings of the AMS), during which we both presented papers. His friendship, kindness and humor strongly enhanced the conference experience for me.

While at Cornell, I took graduate seminars on a wide variety of topics, in many different departments. Many of these seminars informed my dissertation, with respect to my methodology and ideas. I greatly benefited from Geoffrey Waite's seminar on Nietzsche. His insights into Nietzsche's thought allowed me to grasp more fully Nietzsche's anti-Wagnerian musical aesthetics. Michael Steinberg's opera seminar was another formative influence; in that course, we studied Wagner's opera *Parsifal*, Debussy's opera *Pelleas et Melisande*, and Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner*, as well as many other operas and texts. I had the opportunity to give a seminar presentation on some of my ideas about Nietzsche and this helped me think through the relationships between Debussy, Nietzsche, and Wagner.

With regard to my music analysis skills, I am grateful for my work with Kristin Taavola, James Webster, and David Rosen. I took a seminar with Kristin Taavola on French music, in which we examined some of the distinctive features of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century French works. Our work in this seminar helped me to develop a toolkit of French musical features, which ultimately led to my understanding of the French exotic lexicon. I did an independent study project with James Webster, focusing on Bach's harmonization of modal chorale melodies. Although Debussy and Bach have a very different approach to modality, the project nonetheless informed my work on Debussy, sharpening my understanding of how composers incorporate modality into a tonal framework. I am extremely grateful to David Rosen for his seminars on the operas of Puccini and Britten. In those seminars, I acquired tools for analyzing the relationship between music and text in opera. Those tools have proven very useful in my analyses of French exotic opera.

I would like to thank Judith Peraino for offering a seminar on approaches to popular music. In my paper for that seminar, I applied some of Adorno's theories about mass culture to the Broadway musical *Les Misérables*. Judith helped me with the process of analyzing music through a philosophical lens. She enabled me to devise strategies for discussing relationships between musical works and philosophical ideas. My experience with this seminar paper helped to lay the groundwork for this dissertation, in which I bring Debussy's musical works into dialogue with Nietzsche's philosophy.

As a counterpoint to my intellectual life in seminars, I also had a rich intellectual and social life outside the classroom. I am deeply indebted to my friends Rachel Lewis, Zarko Cvejic, Kristin Kane, Sam Dwinell, Francesca Brittan, and Emily Dolan. My friends and I share a passionate love of analysis and understanding. We had long conversations in which we analyzed a wide variety of issues—political issues, musicological topics, critical theory, and even our own psyches! These conversations nourished me emotionally and intellectually.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Debussy was a nationalist and was to be so to the point of intolerance.”  
—Louis Laloy, 1932<sup>1</sup>

The notion of musical Frenchness emerges as a central preoccupation in Claude Debussy’s prose writings. Again and again, almost obsessively, Debussy asserts that French music should seek to represent the French national spirit. To this end, he urges French composers to rid their music of all foreign influence: “There’s too much German influence in France and we’re still suffocated by it. Don’t you go the same way, don’t let yourselves be taken in by false profundity and the detestable German ‘modernstyl’”<sup>2</sup> (1910). He deplores the influence of foreign musical styles in France: “Contemporary dramatic music, however, embraces everything from Wagnerian metaphysics to the trivialities of the Italians—not a particularly French orientation. Perhaps in the end we will see the light and achieve conciseness of expression and form (the fundamental qualities of French genius)”<sup>3</sup> (1902).

Debussy’s call for French purity is motivated in large part by anti-Wagnerian sentiment; he writes that, due to Gluck’s influence, “French music gained the

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Laloy, *Louis Laloy on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky*, ed. and trans. Deborah Priest (Hampshire, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), 115.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, ed. and trans. François Lesure and Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 232.

<sup>3</sup> François Lesure, ed. *Debussy on Music: The Critical Writing of the Great French Composer Claude Debussy*, trans. Richard Langham Smith (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1977), 84-85. Debussy’s attitude toward Wagner will be thoroughly explored in Chapter Three, in the section titled “Debussy’s Obsession with Wagner.” In that section, I examine how and why Debussy’s attitudes toward Wagner changed throughout his life.



unexpected benefit of falling straight into the arms of Wagner”<sup>4</sup> (1903). He is, of course, being sarcastic; Wagner’s influence is, according to Debussy, a curse, not a benefit. In fact, Debussy refers scornfully to “Wagner’s bombastic metaphysics,” and he rails against Wagner’s influence on French music: “We tolerated overblown orchestras, tortuous forms, cheap luxury and clashing colors”<sup>5</sup> (1915).

Reacting against Wagnerian influence, Debussy argues that French composers should ground their music in indigenous traditions, instead of looking to other countries (such as Germany) for inspiration. He writes, ruefully, that “one is forced to admit that French music has, for too long, followed paths that definitely lead away from this clearness of expression, this conciseness and precision of form, both of which are the very qualities peculiar to French genius”<sup>6</sup> (1903). He urges composers to reconnect with their national roots, and he praises French musical traditions such as the “purely French tradition in the works of Rameau” (1903).

But if musical Frenchness was a guiding principle for Debussy, we stumble upon a contradiction when we ask *how* this principle manifests itself in his music. For his music does not seem to signal anything that we might interpret as Frenchness. Surveying the titles of Debussy’s works, one is struck by the number of titles that refer, not to France, but to foreign locales: *Pagodes*, suggesting an Asian (perhaps Indonesian) context; *La Soirée dans Grenade*, referring to a city in Spain; *Pour l’Égyptienne*, evoking Egypt; *Iberia*, evoking Spain; *Khamma*, an Egyptian-themed ballet, *Canope*, portraying ancient Egyptian urns; *La Sérénade*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 112.

*Interrompue*, portraying a Spanish-style serenade; *La Puerta del Vino*, a Spanish-flavored piece in the form of a habanera, and many others. In short, Debussy's output is replete with exotic-sounding titles. And his music, as we shall see, is replete with exotic markers—markers that seem to point away from France toward foreign, exotic locales.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Debussy's music seems to be at odds with his nationalistic politics. It is my aim in this dissertation to explore the relationship between Debussy's nationalism and his obsession with exoticism, and to work through the apparent contradictions between these two strands of his musical aesthetics.

In order to grasp this problem more fully, let us turn to a specific piece by Debussy: *La Soirée dans Grenade*, the second piece in *Estampes* (1903). We will scrutinize this work for signs of the “Frenchness” that Debussy valued so highly. Before we look at the score, let us pause for a moment to reflect upon the title of the set *Estampes*. This title suggests a set of engravings, not a set of realistic depictions. In a 1903 letter, Debussy himself points out that the pieces in *Estampes* are based on imagination and fantasy: “I have also written three piano pieces whose

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars such as Susan McClary and Carl Dahlhaus have listed a series of musical markers of exoticism, including pedal points, augmented seconds, modality, nonfunctional chromatic coloration, pentatonicism, and certain types of dance rhythms. Throughout this dissertation, I draw upon their work in various ways. Susan McClary, *Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 53. Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 306. I also draw heavily on the work of Debussy scholars such as Jeremy Day O'Connell, Matthew Brown, Richard Parks, Roy Howat, and Boyd Pomeroy. Matthew Brown, *Iberia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Jeremy Day-O'Connell, *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007). Roy Howat, “Debussy and the Orient,” *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*, ed. Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Milner, 45-81 (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994). Richard Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Boyd Pomeroy, “Toward A New Tonal Practice: Chromaticism and Form in Debussy's Orchestral Music” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2000).

titles I particularly love: *Pagodes*, *Evening in Grenada*, *Gardens in the Rain*. When one does not have the means to pay for voyages, it is necessary to use imagination to compensate for this.”<sup>8</sup>

Why would a staunch nationalist such as Debussy compose a set of travel fantasies? Two of the titles, *Pagodes* and *Soirée*, evoke foreign countries—Indonesia and Spain respectively. This is surprising in light of Debussy’s antipathy to foreign influence. If the title seems to contradict Debussy’s nationalistic intentions, then the musical style of *Soirée* presents us with an even *more* striking contradiction.

What we see in the music is a heavy use of exotic markers—markers, in other words, of foreignness. It is hard to imagine that such markers could possibly signal Frenchness. For instance, the pedal point that begins the piece is a time-honored signifier of exoticism. Ralph Locke has called attention to the exotic connotations of pedal points in the works of Debussy and others. Locke also points out that pedal points in exotic works tend to be placed in a low register.<sup>9</sup> Although Locke does not discuss *Soirée*, I would suggest that his observation is borne out by its opening bars, which begin with a long-held pedal point on C# in the low register of the piano. Adding to the exotic color of the music, the arabesque-like melody is laced with augmented seconds (ex. I, mm. 1-15).

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<sup>8</sup> “J’ai écrit aussi trios morceaux de piano don’t j’aime surtout les titres que voici: *Pagodes*, *La Soirée dans Grenade*, *Jardins sous la Pluie*. Quand on n’a pas le moyen de se payer des voyages, il faut y suppléer par l’imagination.” Claude Debussy, *Correspondance*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005), 778. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph Locke, “Unacknowledged Exoticism in Debussy: The Incidental Music for *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*,” *The Musical Quarterly* (Nov 2008): 399.

The Spanish character of the work is enhanced through Debussy's persistent use of habanera rhythms. As Parakilas observes, "the dotted 'bass' rhythm of the

**La soirée dans Grenade**

**Mouvement de Habanera**  
*Commencer lentement dans un rythme nonchalamment gracieux*

Example I. Claude Debussy, *La Soirée dans Grenade* (1903), mm. 1-15

habanera sounds almost without break throughout the piece.”<sup>10</sup> The piece also uses polyrhythmic patterns in which triplets and duplets sound simultaneously. By using

<sup>10</sup> James Parakilas, “How Spain got a Soul,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 175.

these patterns, which are characteristic of many habaneras<sup>11</sup>, Debussy paints an evocative portrait of a Spanish dance.

Thus, through his use of long pedal tones, augmented seconds, and habanera rhythms, Debussy creates a highly exotic sound-world in *Soirée*. Each of these features, if used singly, might not be sufficient to signal an exotic context. But, when used in conjunction with each other, the combined effect projects a strongly exotic character. In measures 7-14, for instance, an ostinato figure (based on a habanera rhythm) is paired with a heavy use of augmented seconds; the combination of these features imparts a distinctly exotic flavor to the music. All of these features continue to be used in conjunction throughout most of the piece.

The harmonies, too, enhance the exotic sound of the work. *La Soirée* begins on an extended dominant pedal, but this pedal is not treated as something that requires resolution to the tonic. Indeed, the pedal's function as dominant becomes clear only in retrospect, when the music seems, however fleetingly, to crystallize around F# in mm. 17-20 (ex. II, mm. 16-20). But even this moment of relative lucidity is shrouded in ambiguity, for F# is harmonized not as the root of a tonic chord, but as part of a dominant-seventh-type sonority. Here, Debussy blurs the boundaries between tonic and dominant, harmonizing the tonic as the root of a dominant-seventh chord.

Measures 17-20, which present a chain of parallel dominant-seventh-type chords, similarly blurs the distinction between tonic and dominant functions. The

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<sup>11</sup> We will see many examples of triplets paired with (or sometimes alternating with) duplets when we examine Habaneras by Bizet, Chabrier, and Ravel.

listener is made to wonder which (if any) of these chords are to be heard as tonic chords. The passage prompts the following (unanswerable) questions: Are all the chords in this chain equally stable? Or are they all equally *unstable*? Or are some of them stable, and others unstable? Debussy provides the listener with no basis for distinguishing between stable and unstable chords in this phrase; hence, the conventional polarity between stable tonic and unstable dominant is dissolved.



Example II. Claude Debussy, *La Soirée dans Grenade* (1903), mm. 16-20

This ambiguous slippage between tonic and dominant, everywhere present in *La Soirée*, is characteristic of much Spanish music—and hence appropriate in the context of a musical evocation of Granada. As Peter Manuel points out, Spanish music tends to be based on a quasi-modal orientation in which tonic and dominant are both treated as stable chords, with the dominant divested of its conventional need for resolution: “Instead of oscillating between a reposeful ‘tonic’ and an unstable ‘dominant’ chord, these ostinatos are better seen as swinging, pendulum-

like, between two competing tonal centers.”<sup>12</sup> Manuel does not discuss *Soirée* in his article, but I would argue that the procedures he identifies, typically Spanish in origin, play an important role in its harmonic language. These procedures imbue it with an exotic (and thus apparently non-French) character.<sup>13</sup>

As the above analysis suggests, *Soirée* makes heavy use of exotic markers. Thus, *Soirée* confronts us with a puzzling discrepancy between Debussy’s nationalism (as expressed in his prose writings) and his salient use of exoticism (as conveyed in his music). In order to understand this apparent discrepancy, we must ask: why does *Soirée* (along with many other works by Debussy) evoke a foreign style—the style of Spanish music—when he claimed to value musical Frenchness above all else? Perhaps, though, we shouldn’t be too hasty to assume that *Soirée* is based on a foreign (i.e. non-French) musical language. Perhaps we should explore the ways in which it engages with French national styles, even though it appears at first glance to be thoroughly Spanish.

In exploring the possible links between *Soirée* and French musical traditions, we encounter a tantalizing clue that might guide our investigation: it strongly resembles a *Habanera* composed 18 years earlier by the French composer Emmanuel Chabrier. As Matthew Brown observes, both works feature prominent

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Manuel, “From Scarlatti to ‘Guantanamera’: Dual Tonicity in Spanish and Latin American Musics,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55:2 (Summer 2002): 319.

<sup>13</sup> Such procedures were recognized as Spanish in Debussy’s time period; for example, in an 1896 article in *Le Ménestrel*, Julien Tiersot observes that several of the dance numbers in Bizet’s Spanish-flavored opera *Carmen* treat the dominant chord like a tonic, blurring the distinction between tonic and dominant. Julien Tiersot, “Musique Antique: Les Nouvelles Découvertes de Delphes,” *Le Ménestrel* (Feb 1896): 43.

pedal points on C#/Db and contain similar melodic figures.<sup>14</sup> (ex. III, mm. 22-29)

*Soirée* also bears a striking resemblance to a Habanera by Ravel. Both works are in the same key (F# minor) and they both contain long-held pedal points on C#.

Moreover, *Soirée*'s main melody is closely related to the opening melody in Ravel's



Example III. Emmanuel Chabrier, *Habanera* (1885), mm. 22-29

*Habanera*. (ex. IV, mm. 6-15) So striking was the resemblance between the two works that Ravel accused Debussy of plagiarism.<sup>15</sup>

As the above analysis suggests, two French composers--Ravel and Chabrier--exerted a significant influence on *Soirée*. Thus, *Soirée*, despite its apparent

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Brown, *Debussy's Ibéria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 129.

<sup>15</sup> For details on the plagiarism case, see Roy Howat, "Ravel and the Piano," in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 74-75. See also Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality*, (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2004), 180-81.



Spanishness, is based primarily on *French* sources (the *Habaneras* by Chabrier and Ravel), not on Spanish sources. The evidence suggests that Debussy derives the “Spanish” style of *Soirée* from the Spanish-themed works of French composers. In that sense, then, *Soirée* is more French than Spanish, for it draws heavily upon the

The image displays a musical score for Maurice Ravel's *Habanera* (1895), specifically measures 6-15. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time, key of D major. It is divided into two systems, each with a first (I) and second (II) ending. The first system includes a 'p espressivo' marking. The second system includes a 'pp' marking. The music is characterized by a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more melodic line in the left hand. The score concludes with a final cadence in the right hand.

Example IV. Maurice Ravel, *Habanera* (1895), mm. 6-15

works of two French composers.<sup>16</sup> In brief, *Soirée* is strongly tied to French musical culture. This is an important and meaningful observation, because it allows us to situate Debussy's *Soirée* in a French context, indicating a potential link to French musical traditions. This link is of central importance to my thesis, because this dissertation aims to explore the relationship between French national traditions and Debussy's use of exoticism. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that Debussy based his exotic-sounding music almost exclusively upon French sources.

### *Absorbed Exoticism: Nuages*

In the previous section, we noted an apparent discrepancy between Debussy's nationalistic sentiments and his heavy use of exotic markers. In this dissertation, we will discover that this discrepancy is not limited to his overtly exotic works, but extends to many of his ostensibly non-exotic pieces (that is, pieces without exoticizing titles). As I will argue throughout this dissertation, Debussy's general musical style is based on a salient use of exotic markers, regardless of whether the title signifies exoticism or not. I refer to this phenomenon as absorption, an extremely useful term coined by Ralph Locke.<sup>17</sup> Locke defines absorption as the use of exotic musical markers in pieces with no explicit connection to exotic subject matter. Revuluri borrows the term from Locke, but uses it in a different way. For

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<sup>16</sup> Although it is possible that Chabrier (and maybe even Ravel) drew on authentic Spanish sources, Debussy, I would suggest, did *not* draw on such sources. Rather, he drew on the works of other French composers as the source of his "Spanish" musical style.

<sup>17</sup> Ralph P. Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998)

Revuluri, absorption involves the use of exotic musical markers in French transcriptions of non-Western music.<sup>18</sup>

I focus on absorption in art music, as a compositional style rather than a transcriptional style. Therefore, my definition of absorption is closer to Locke's than Revuluri's. But unlike Locke, I look at Debussy's nationalism alongside his absorption, asking how these two strands of his musical aesthetic work together. As an example of absorption in Debussy's music, let us turn to *Nuages* (1897-1899), the first in a set of orchestral nocturnes.

The title *Nuages* (Clouds) signifies no obvious connection to the exotic, but an examination of the score reveals that this work is replete with exotic markers.<sup>19</sup> The middle section in particular (mm. 64-80) brims over with exotic features. In this section, the flute and harp play a pentatonic melody while the other instruments provide static Dorian harmonies (ex. V, mm. 64-68). The combination of flute and harp imparts a distinctly exotic flavor to the music, for this combination had long been used in French opera to signify the exotic.<sup>20</sup> The pentatonicism of the melody

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<sup>18</sup> Revuluri, "On Anxiety and Absorption: Musical Encounters with the Exotique in fin-de-siecle France," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2007), 12

<sup>19</sup> Scholarly studies of *Nuages* have overlooked exoticism as a central component of this work, focusing instead on questions of form, tonality, and harmony. Mark DeVoto, for instance, discusses *Nuages* from the point of view of attenuated tonality and non-functional harmony. Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2004). Richard Parks discusses transformational operations and rotational form in *Nuages*. Richard Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Matthew Brown similarly takes up the question of form and architecture in *Nuages*. Matthew Brown, *Debussy's Ibéria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> The exotic connotations of flute and harp will be taken up more fully in Chapter One. Many scholars have observed that this particular combination of instruments is an exotic signifier in French opera. Lynne Johnson, for instance, points out that Saint-Saëns' *Trois Tableaux Symphoniques d'après "La Foi"* evokes the exotic through the use of a flute-harp duo. Lynne Johnson, "Camille Saint-Saëns' Changing Exoticism and the Interesting Case of *La Foi*," *Journal of Musicological Research* 25 (2006): 86. Jann Pasler observes that many French exotic operas feature "delicate orchestration with flutes and harps." Jann Pasler, "Race, Orientalism and Distinction in the Wake of

also signals exoticism. Pentatonicism plays a salient role in many musical evocations of exoticism, including Debussy's own works; pentatonicism, as we shall see in Chapter One, figures prominently in Debussy's exotically-themed *Pagodes*.

The static nature of the harmonies in the middle section of *Nuages* contributes to the exotic tone—stasis is (as we saw in *Soirée*) an exotic marker that signals the

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the 'Yellow Peril,'" in *Western Music and its Others*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 88.



alleged “timelessness” and “primitivism” of the East. Moreover, the Dorian inflections in the harmony (i.e. the use of B# in a D# minor context, in mm. 66, 69, and 74) further enhance the exotic feeling of the passage (ex. VI, mm. 74-78). Modality is frequently used as an exotic marker in French opera, figuring prominently in, for instance, Massenet’s *Hérodiade*, Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila*, and Delibes’ *Lakmé* (all three of these works will be discussed in the following chapter).

In short, then, *Nuages* makes use of four exotic markers: pentatonicism, modality, stasis, and exotic orchestral effects. Although none of these features, if used singly, would necessarily connote exoticism, their collective effect is strongly exotic. Thus, *Nuages* features many exotic markers, all of which work in tandem to produce an exotic sound-world. What are we to make of the exoticism in *Nuages*? Why are exotic markers cropping up in an ostensibly non-exotic work? Exotic markers are to be expected in a work such as *Soirée*, which represents a foreign culture, but it is hard to explain the appearance of such markers in a musical portrait of clouds. What are these markers doing here? Is Debussy attempting to portray clouds as somehow exotic or “oriental”? What, if anything, is exotic about clouds?

In response to these questions, I would argue that Debussy is not necessarily attempting to portray clouds as exotic. I contend that, in many of his works (including, but not limited to, *Nuages*) Debussy absorbs exotic markers into his musical language, incorporating them into the syntax of the work. In his hands, such markers do not always connote an explicitly exotic context; rather, they are

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Example VI. Claude Debussy, Noctures, No. 1, Nuages (1897-1899), mm. 74-78

divested (at least partially) of their exotic connotations, becoming features of his general style rather than extra-musical signifiers. I will be developing this argument throughout my dissertation, particularly in Chapter Five, in which I examine Debussy's absorption of exoticism into his musical style.

To sum up: we have discovered that *Nuages* and *Soirée* both make liberal use of exotic markers; both of these works invite us to ponder the reasons for Debussy's engagement with musical exoticism. Why did Debussy, who sought to express the French national spirit through his music, make such a heavy use of non-French (i.e. exotic) markers? And this question brings us back to the same paradox that we encountered earlier: the discrepancy between his stated intentions (the staging of musical Frenchness) and his musical realization of these intentions (a heavy use of exotic, and thus presumably non-French, musical features).

What are we to make of this discrepancy? How do we make sense of the paradox at the heart of Debussy's musical style? Can Debussy's nationalism be reconciled with his love of musical exoticism? What is the relationship between these two seemingly antithetical currents? We must also ask: why *was* Debussy such a staunch nationalist? What did nationalism mean to him? And how, if at all, does his avowed nationalism manifest itself in his music?

In this dissertation, I seek to explore these questions, situating Debussy's music in a rich cultural context—a context which, as I will argue, sheds light on the knotty problem of Debussy's musical style and its connection to nationalism. This problem has not been addressed in the literature. To be sure, Debussy's nationalism has received scholarly attention, as has his exoticism. But scholars have not



explored the relationship between these two (seemingly opposed) strands. Jane Fulcher, Anya Suchitzky, and Scott Messing discuss Debussy's nationalistic politics, but they omit any mention of his interest in musical exoticism. Ralph Locke, James Parakilas, and Jeremy Day-O'Connell, on the other hand, explore Debussy's interest in musical exoticism, but they neglect the question of nationalism. Unlike the above-mentioned scholars, I seek to probe the connections between Debussy's exoticism and nationalism. In probing these connections, I will be tracing the history of French exoticism, arguing that it comprises a distinct French tradition stretching back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Nietzsche and French Exoticism*

In addition to arguing for the existence of a strong French tradition of exoticism, this dissertation also argues that the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had a profound influence on musical exoticism in fin-de-siècle France (and on Debussy in particular). Specifically, I hope to show that Nietzsche intensified and reshaped a long-standing tradition of French exoticism. By examining the history of this tradition, and the formative influence of Nietzsche, I aim to show that Debussy forged a nationalistic French identity through his use of musical exoticisms. Nietzsche's influence on French musical culture has, surprisingly, been overlooked in current-day musicological literature. His influence was, however, noted (and much discussed) in fin-de-siècle French music journals, as we will discover in due course. In particular, Nietzsche's 1888 monograph *The Case of Wagner* (translated into French in 1893) was enormously popular in French

musical circles, and is frequently discussed in journals of the time period, such as *La Revue Musicale*, *Le Guide Musical*, *Le Mercure Musical*, *Le Courrier Musical*, *Revue Française de Musique*, among many others.

As I will argue, *The Case of Wagner* engages with questions of French exoticism, nationalism, and anti-Wagnerism—the very questions that preoccupied Debussy. In my opinion, Debussy’s attempt to grapple with these questions was profoundly shaped by Nietzsche’s writings. To support this claim, I will present evidence that Debussy was intimately acquainted with Nietzsche’s *Case of Wagner* and *Zarathustra*, and viewed these works as an important influence on his struggle to create a coherent national identity. I believe that my discussion of Nietzsche enriches our understanding of Debussy’s exoticism, as well as French exoticism more generally. French exoticism has been the focus of much recent scholarly attention. For example, James Parakilas, in “How Spain Got a Soul,” explores the question: why did so many fin-de-siècle French composers (such as Debussy) write Spanish-flavored music?<sup>21</sup> He argues that many Frenchmen felt a need to distance themselves from Spain, because Spain was a politically weak nation. For Parakilas, French composers exoticized Spain as a means of distancing themselves from its political weakness. I disagree with Parakilas; as I will argue, the French exoticization of Spain was mainly tied to Wagnerism, Nietzsche, and anti-German sentiment.

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<sup>21</sup> James Parakilas, “How Spain Got a Soul,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998).

Like Parakilas, Ralph Locke takes up the question of Debussy's interest in exoticism. For Locke, Debussy's engagement with exoticism was influenced primarily by Russian music. In a section on Debussy's exoticism, Locke argues that "the most lasting faraway influence upon Debussy—and perhaps on Western European music of his era, generally—came from Russia."<sup>22</sup> Locke bases his argument on Debussy's use of the whole-tone scale, which he claims is derived from Russian music. But the majority of exotic markers (pentatonicism, stasis, augmented seconds, and modality) in Debussy's music can be traced to French sources. Debussy's use of exotic markers is, in my opinion, influenced primarily by French traditions, not by faraway musical styles in Russia or anywhere else (notwithstanding his use of the whole-tone scale).

In Chapter One, I will support this claim by examining the striking similarities between Debussy's exotic works and the exotic works of other French composers (such as Saint-Saëns, Bizet, Massenet, and many others), in order to demonstrate that Debussy and his French predecessors draw on the same set of exotic markers. I will then point out a number of significant differences between the French and Russian markers of exoticism (for instance, exotic works by Russian composers often contain chromatic motion between the fifth and sixth scale degrees; exotic works by French composers do not make use of this particular trope). My aim is to show (through musical analysis) that Debussy's works are based almost entirely on the French markers of exoticism, not the Russian markers. I will then conclude that

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<sup>22</sup> Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 222.

Debussy, guided by Nietzsche's influential remarks on French exoticism, drew on long-standing local traditions of exoticism for specific nationalistic purposes.

Central to my argument is the claim that Debussy's nationalistic engagement with exoticism was motivated in part by his anti-Wagnerism. Seeking to demonstrate that the French tradition of exoticism was for Debussy an antidote to Wagner's Germanic operas, I situate Debussy's ambivalent reception of Wagner within the broader context of fin-de-siècle responses to Wagner. To this end, I have benefited from Stephen Huebner's detailed examination of Wagnerian reception in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, for Huebner's discussion of this issue lays some of the groundwork for my own inquiries.<sup>23</sup> Huebner shows that Wagner was a highly contested figure in turn-of-the-century French culture, provoking a complex variety of responses from French composers. Such responses, as he argues, ran the gamut from adulation and even emulation (as in Chausson's *Le Roi Arthur*) to outright rejection of the Wagnerian ideal and all that it stood for (as in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*). In Huebner's thorough and persuasive musical analyses, he examines the ways in which fin-de-siècle French operatic works incorporated (or modified) Wagnerian techniques such as Leitmotivic integration and endless melody. He shows that many French composers, among them Saint-Saëns and Massenet, drew on Wagnerian techniques in creative and flexible ways, blending traditionally French traits (such as brevity and light orchestration) with Wagnerian features.

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Huebner, *French opera at the fin de siècle: Wagnerism, nationalism, and style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

But Huebner's work, which elucidates many of the ways in which French composers interacted with Wagner's legacy, nonetheless overlooks what I consider to be the key issues in the French reaction against Wagner: Nietzsche and the exotic lexicon. As I will argue, the terms of the French reaction against Wagner were defined mainly by Nietzsche; the means, by the lexicon of exotic markers that had long been part of the French operatic style. My consideration of these issues will, I believe, profoundly enrich Huebner's account of the ways in which fin-de-siècle French musical life formed itself around a set of complex responses to Wagner.

Through my analysis of Nietzsche's influence on Debussy, I seek to shed light on the questions that we encountered above, in our analyses of *Soirée* and *Nuages*. When examining these works, we asked: why would Debussy absorb exotic markers into his musical style? How does this mesh with his nationalistic desire to represent France musically? And what kinds of musical--and extra-musical--meanings are produced through Debussy's heavy use of exotic markers? This question has not been addressed by scholars. To be sure, scholars have explored the ways in which Debussy's nationalism shaped his prose writings and musical works. But they have not explored the rich network of connections—and apparent contradictions—between Debussy's nationalism and exoticism. Scott Messing, for instance, locates the musical manifestation of Debussy's nationalistic politics in his neo-Baroque works—works which purport, with varying degrees of explicitness, to evoke 18<sup>th</sup>-century French genres and stylistic features.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in music: from the genesis of the concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 38-39.

I agree with Messing that Debussy's neo-Baroque works reflect his nationalistic politics. But I contend that Debussy's neo-Baroque works, despite their undeniably nationalistic connotations, are *not* the main locus of his nationalistic engagement with French traditions. The main locus, I argue, is to be found in Debussy's use of exotic markers—a topic that Messing never addresses.

Musical markers of French exoticism receive some scholarly attention in Sindhumathi Revuluri's dissertation "On Anxiety and Absorption: Musical Encounters with the Exotique in fin-de-siecle France."<sup>25</sup> Revuluri examines the ways in which French ethnomusicologists transcribed non-Western music. She points out that these transcriptions drew on a French code of musical exoticism, rather than accurately reflecting the musical features of the non-Western repertoires under study. In showing that French perceptions of non-Western music were shaped by exotic markers, Revuluri underscores the significant role of exotic markers in fin-de-siecle French culture. She considers this to be a form of absorption—the absorption of exotic markers into the ethnomusicological world of transcriptions.

Although Revuluri and I share an interest in the concept of absorption, we examine the phenomenon in different bodies of music. Revuluri looks at the ways in which exotic markers were incorporated (i.e. absorbed) into ethnomusicological transcriptions, but I examine the absorption of exotic markers into ostensibly non-exotic compositions. Focusing on art music rather than transcriptions, I attempt to

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<sup>25</sup> Revuluri, "On Anxiety and Absorption."

show that exotic markers played a leading role in fin-de-siecle French art music, especially that of Debussy.

Revuluri touches only in passing on French art music. In her brief discussions of repertoire by Debussy and Ravel, she focuses on the absorption of rhythmic markers of exoticism. Sextuplet rhythms, and polyrhythmic patterns, are among the rhythmic markers that she addresses.<sup>26</sup> I broaden the investigation beyond rhythm to include melody, harmony and instrumentation.

Not only do Revuluri and I differ in our choice of repertoire and markers, we also choose to focus on different strands of French nationalism. She examines the French interest in folksong as a form of nationalism. Many collections of French folksong were published at the turn of the century, often with added harmonizations. These collections, as she points out, served as a source of national pride, and also provided France with a sense of music history and tradition.<sup>27</sup> This particular strand of musical nationalism is tangential to my own work, because French folksong was of only minor importance to Debussy's nationalist agenda. His musical nationalism, as I hope to show, led him to celebrate French Baroque music and French exoticism, not French folksong.

Debussy's nationalism, deeply rooted in the history of French art music, is insightfully addressed in the work of Anya Suschitzky. She focuses on the role of nationalism in Debussy's prose writings. However, she does not explore how Debussy's nationalism expressed itself through his musical works. She justifies her

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>27</sup> Revuluri writes, "By deeming the French folk tradition *historical*...the musicians involved in folksong collection elevate contemporary French culture by defining it as dynamic, giving it the benefit of recorded past and allowing it to gain strength from that history." Ibid., 176.

neglect of his music by claiming that “The personas that take shape in Debussy’s essays may seem to differ in kind and significance from the identities that populate his music.”<sup>28</sup>

But the gulf between his prose writings and his musical works is not as wide as Suschitzky suggests. His prose writings and his musical works can profitably be treated in tandem, as expressions of a nationalism that played itself out in myriad ways. In his prose writings, he repeatedly asserts that his music is grounded in French national traditions. His music, I believe, bears out this assertion, for it is grounded in the French national tradition of exoticism—a tradition which Suchitzky, who despairs of finding connections between Debussy’s prose and music, overlooks completely.

Like Suchitzky, Fulcher is puzzled by the apparent discrepancy between Debussy’s music and prose. She observes that, in Debussy’s prose writings, he insists upon “the primacy of national values and the ‘truly French.’”<sup>29</sup> But, according to Fulcher, Debussy’s music seems to follow a different path from that which he prescribed in his writings, for his music often evokes “the Orient and Spain,” producing what Fulcher calls a “tension with nationalist orthodoxy.”<sup>30</sup> This tension is, however, resolved by my analysis of Nietzsche’s influence on Debussy. I argue that Debussy, guided by Nietzsche’s writings on French exoticism, drew upon exotic markers in order to ground his music in a long-standing national

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<sup>28</sup> Anya Suschitzky, “Debussy’s Rameau: French Music and Its Others,” *Musical Quarterly* 86:3 (Fall 2002): 401.

<sup>29</sup> Jane Fulcher, *French cultural politics and music: from the Dreyfus affair to the first world war* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 182.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.



tradition; thus, Debussy's exoticism reflects his nationalistic desire to be "truly French."

In this dissertation, I aim to bring together three strands of Debussy's musical thought: **exoticism**, **nationalism**, and **anti-Wagnerism**. Each individual strand has received much scholarly attention. For instance, as we have seen, Locke has written extensively about exoticism in French music (as well as other repertoires such as Italian music). We have also seen how Fulcher, Messing and Suschitzky have analyzed the cultural politics of Debussy's nationalism. Huebner, as discussed above, addresses the issue of French attitudes toward Wagner, including Debussy's ambivalent attitude. But no one has brought these three strands together.

I hope to show that these familiar topics yield new insights when we look at them in tandem. Thus, it is my goal to bring the three themes into conversation with each other. We will see that **exoticism** became, for Debussy, a symbol of **nationalism**, motivated by his **anti-Wagnerism**. How are these three strands linked? I will explore several answers to this question throughout my dissertation. Nietzsche will emerge as a key player; he offered French composers the tools with which they could link these three strands.

### *Exoticism Defined*

In 1898, the French musicologist Camille Bellaigue wrote, "L'exotisme est le goût et la représentation des choses éloignées et rares."<sup>31</sup> In a 1906 article on

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<sup>31</sup> "Exoticism is the taste for and the representation of distant and rare things." Camille Bellaigue, "De l'Exotisme en Musique," in *Etudes Musicales et Nouvelles Silhouettes de Musiciens* (Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1898), 326. Translation my own.

exoticism, in the *Revue Musicale*, Henri Quittard writes that French composers are drawn to “un Orient lointain, tant soit peu fabuleux, qu’elle s’en va chercher les themes qu’elle veut plier sous ses lois et obliger à entrer dans la trame de ses compositions.”<sup>32</sup> Quittard points out that foreign musical material is bent to the laws of Western compositional styles. Thus, he implies that musical exoticism operates within a thoroughly Western framework.

Quittard was not the only fin-de-siècle French musicologist to assert that musical exoticism operates on Western terms, for a Western audience. According to the *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire* (1913), French musicians “Nous...semblons hantés par l’extrême diversité et l’intense poésie...de toutes ces manifestations d’art exotique. Chose singulière, transposés dans notre langage, les themes n’y perdent leur sentiment original, mais—et surtout dans les morceaux d’assez longue durée—participent également des caractères généraux de la musique française.”<sup>33</sup> This article, like Quittard’s, underscores the Western bias inherent in musical exoticism. Foreign themes (or the imitation of foreign themes) are transposed into a Western musical language and take on Western musical traits.

But this article also reveals an interesting slippage between exotic musical markers and the characteristics of French music. According to the article, the two seem intertwined, even inseparable. The article raises the question: what is the link

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<sup>32</sup> “...a far-off Orient, more or less fabulous, in which they search for themes that they can bend to their laws and incorporate into the fabric of their compositions.” Henri Quittard, “L’orientalisme musicale: Saint-Saëns orientaliste,” *La Revue Musicale* 1906, vol. 6, 107. Translation my own.

<sup>33</sup> “...are haunted by the extreme diversity and intense poetry...of all manifestations of exotic art. It is strange, that these themes, when transposed into our language, do not lose their original sentiment but—especially in pieces that are long enough—partake of the general characteristics of French music.” “Exotisme,” in *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire* Vol. 6, ed. Lionel de la Laurencie (Paris: Librairie Delagrave, 1913), 99. Translation my own.

between the “general characteristics of French music” and the markers of musical exoticism? This is one of the questions that I explore throughout my dissertation, in an attempt to explain the connections between Debussy’s interest in French musical traditions and his engagement with exotic markers.

To explore these questions in a meaningful and historically grounded fashion, we must keep in mind that exotic markers are inauthentic—they bear little relation to actual non-Western musical traditions. In fact, many French listeners were repelled by the actual sound of non-Western music, preferring their Westernized musical code of exoticism instead. Revuluri points out that French listeners perceived the exotic music at the World’s Fair as cacophonous and chaotic. She quotes from ethnomusicologist Julien Tiersot’s commentary on the World’s Fair: “Dreadful cries, accompanied by an infernal beating of drums...the grand abundance of useless notes and strange notes...there are no themes, simply rhythmic sketches.”<sup>34</sup> Revuluri does not extensively analyze the reasons why French commentators such as Tiersot disliked the sound of non-Western music, but she briefly mentions that this aversion might have stemmed from the unfamiliarity of the music.

But when this aversion is examined in the context of the French exotic tradition, another possible reason emerges. As I hope to show throughout this dissertation, the French set of exotic markers was firmly entrenched in French musical culture. It seems likely that the actual music of the other would have sounded wrong by comparison. Thus, Tiersot’s distaste for non-Western music suggests that the

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<sup>34</sup> Revuluri, “On Anxiety and Absorption,” 72.

French favored their brand of exoticism over the more authentically exotic sounds heard at the World's Fair.

Indeed, French composers had heard very few exotic instruments before the World's Fair in 1889. Jann Pasler observes that visual representations of non-Western instruments were circulating in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, through photos and drawings of exotic instruments in French periodicals.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Paris Conservatory museum had a large collection of exotic instruments. Based on the available evidence, it seems that non-Western music was rarely performed in France prior to 1889. Thus, exotic instruments were seen but not often heard. I would argue that some French composers, having little knowledge of how these instruments sounded, gave their imaginations free rein. By the time that the World's Fair took place, French composers had already established a stable vocabulary of exotic markers—a vocabulary that they formed largely through fantasy, while gazing at the mute instruments displayed behind glass.<sup>36</sup> No wonder French listeners were somewhat taken aback when they heard the actual sounds of non-Western instruments being played at the fair!

Debussy himself acknowledged that musical exoticism was a matter of fantasy, not verisimilitude. In a 1903 letter to Pierre Louys, he writes, "I've also written a piano piece which bears the title *Une Soirée dans Grenade*. And I tell you, if this

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<sup>35</sup> Jann Pasler, "The Utility of Musical Instruments in the Racial and Colonial Agendas of Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129:1 (2004): 24-76.

<sup>36</sup> The Conservatory museum acquired most of its collection before the 1889 World's Fair. According to Pasler, "In 1873 the museum purchased 105 instruments from outside Western Europe....Then, in 1879 [the museum received] 98 more instruments, including 87 from India of which 17 were vinas." *Ibid.*, 34. I would add that this enormous, silent collection must have been a prime site for the projection of Orientalist fantasies.

isn't exactly the music they play in Granada, so much the worse for Granada. No more need be said!"<sup>37</sup> In this letter, Debussy openly acknowledges that *Soirée* (and, by extension, his other exotic works) is a product of his imagination, not the result of ethnomusicological research into foreign musical styles. With his flippant statement, "so much the worse for Granada," he implies that his evocations of Granada are superior to genuine Spanish music. This resonates with Tiersot's dismissive attitude toward actual exotic sounds.

Along similar lines, Louis Laloy, a French musicologist and close friend of Debussy, asserted that Debussy's Spanish-flavored music is "not a document; it is an 'image,' shaped first of all in his mind." Laloy adds that, for Debussy, it is "not a matter of imitating the music of the Spanish people."<sup>38</sup>

The fictive nature of musical exoticism, acknowledged already in 19<sup>th</sup>-century writings on the topic, has become a central theme in current-day scholarship, due in large part to the pioneering work of the cultural theorist Edward Said. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Said forcefully argues that the "Orient" is a Western construction: "The Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West."<sup>39</sup> For Said, Western discourse about the Orient is shaped by stereotypes, falsifications, and projections; Westerners (mis)perceive the Orient through the lens

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<sup>37</sup> Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 136.

<sup>38</sup> Laloy, "Iberia," 216-217.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 5.

of their own stereotypes and false assumptions. Said concludes that “Orientalism overrode the Orient.”<sup>40</sup>

Said’s critique of Orientalism as a system of domination and falsification has exerted a powerful influence on many scholars, including musicologists. Many contemporary musicologists, drawing on Said’s work, call our attention to the inherent inauthenticity of musical exoticism. Locke, for instance, observes that Orientalist musical works “present themselves as fictions, objects intended to provide entertainment or invite aesthetic contemplation.”<sup>41</sup> Susan McClary argues that “The actual signifying practices of exotic music matter little here, for what the European ear expected to hear in exotic music was its own image of difference: this music reinscribes not so much as its ostensible musical model as European notions of what the Other is like.”<sup>42</sup> For Dahlhaus, Orientalism is “an effect whose legitimacy does not depend on whether or not it is anthropologically or historically ‘genuine.’”<sup>43</sup> Taruskin similarly argues that, in exotic musical works, “verisimilitude had to be sacrificed to stereotype, the latter often lacking any authentic counterpart in “Oriental” reality.”<sup>44</sup> As these scholars point out, exotic markers are imaginary, invented, and basically fake.

To be sure, some exotic musical markers are loosely based on non-Western musical styles. But Western bias is always present. Throughout my analyses of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>41</sup> Ralph P. Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East,” *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 105.

<sup>42</sup> McClary, *Carmen*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 305.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music*, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 390.

French exotic music, we will see the interaction between non-Western influence and Western stereotypes. For example, we will discover that Felicien David (the founder of French musical exoticism) sought to imitate the sound of the Mijwiz, an Arabic wind instrument. But his imitations differ significantly from the actual sound of Mijwiz music. Through examining these differences, we can see how French composers reworked their non-Western models and invented a set of exotic clichés.

Building on the above-mentioned arguments about the “fakeness” of exoticism, I seek to take these arguments even further, pursuing them to their logical conclusions. If exotic markers are a European invention, as many scholars have argued, then we should ask: when and how were these markers invented, in what cultural context(s), and in which European countries? Moreover, we must ask: if, as many scholars have demonstrated, exotic markers do not represent the actual non-Western other, then whom or what *do* they represent? I will be concluding that exotic markers ultimately came to represent Frenchness in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exotic lexicon, initially developed by French composers as a code for representing the other, became self-referential and came to signify France itself, the country in which the markers were invented and most heavily used.

This argument goes against the grain of received wisdom: scholars perceive exoticism not as a signifier of Frenchness, but as a signifier of otherness. One of my aims in this dissertation is to demonstrate that exoticism, for Debussy, signified French national identity. I develop this argument through an examination of

primary sources (especially French music journals), French exotic operas, and the exotic works of Debussy.

### *Chapter Summaries*

This dissertation examines Debussy's heavy use of exotic markers, exploring the rich nexus of connections between his French nationalism, his profound engagement with musical exoticism, and his anti-Germanic, anti-Wagnerian sentiments.

In Chapter One, I seek to demonstrate that exoticism was a defining feature of the French national style in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. My evidence for this claim is based on an examination of 19<sup>th</sup>-century French exotic operas by Félicien David (the founder of a French code of musical exoticism) (1810-1876), Berlioz (1803-1869), Lalo (1823-1892), Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), Delibes (1836-1891), Bizet (1838-1875), and Massenet (1842-1912). I also draw evidence from the music criticism of the time period, which identifies exoticism as a distinctly French tradition.

Chapter Two explores a series of overtly exotic works by Debussy, including *Pagodes*, *Canope*, *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, *Pour L'Égyptienne*, *La Flûte de Pan*, *Voiles* and *La Puerta del Vino*. My aim here is to situate Debussy's use of exotic markers within the French tradition of musical exoticism. As we will see in Chapter Two, Debussy draws upon the same vocabulary of musical exoticism as his



predecessors. His heavy reliance on this vocabulary of exoticism prompts me to ask: what cultural forces led him to become so interested in musical exoticism?

In Chapter Three, I provide context that helps us develop some answers to this question. Here, I examine Debussy's anti-Wagnerian nationalism, situated in the broader context of French nationalism and anti-Wagnerism at the fin-de-siècle. I look at Debussy's prose writings, in which he frequently urges French composers to overthrow Wagnerian influence. I contextualize these writings by discussing Debussy's own attempts to purge his music of Wagnerian influence. I also discuss Debussy's nationalistic interest in the French Baroque era, which he viewed as a golden age free from the corrupting influence of German music. We then turn to *The Case of Wagner*, an 1888 polemic by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (translated into French in 1892). As I will show, this work had a profound influence on the anti-Wagnerian movement in France.

Chapter Four turns to Nietzsche's influence on Debussy's reaction against Wagner. This chapter links Debussy's interest in exoticism to Nietzsche's critique of Wagnerian metaphysics, through an analysis of several exotic dance pieces by Debussy, including *La Soirée dans Grenade*, *Lindaraja*, *Ibéria*, *Les Collines d'Anacapri*, and *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*. Nietzsche's view of Bizet's exotic opera *Carmen* as an antidote to Wagner is, I argue, the main impetus behind Debussy's interest in musical exoticism.

Chapter Five continues to investigate Debussy's exoticism in relation to Nietzsche and French nationalism. This chapter examines markers of exoticism in ostensibly non-exotic works by Debussy, such as *Hommage à Rameau*, *Des Pas sur*

*la Neige, La Cathédrale Engloutie, Quatour Op. 10, Nuages, Fêtes and L'Isle*

*Joyeuse*. This chapter demonstrates that Debussy incorporated musical markers of exoticism into his general style. I conclude by arguing that, in Debussy's hands, exotic markers do not function primarily as signifiers of foreign cultures; rather, they become emblems of French national identity.

## Chapter One

### *The French Tradition of Exoticism*

In 1894, the French music critic A.M. Auzende wrote, “Nous devons considérer Félicien David comme un des principaux initiateurs de l’école française moderne, comme ayant eu une influence profonde sur le grand mouvement musical qui vient de se produire chez nous.”<sup>45</sup> Along similar lines, the French musicologist Victor Loret, writing in 1917, described David as “un des inspirations les plus exquis de notre musique nationale.”<sup>46</sup> As the above passages indicate, David was viewed as the founder of a French musical tradition. These passages invite us to ask: what type of music did David write that enabled him to develop a new French tradition? A.M. Auzende himself poses this question: “Quelles sont donc les qualités maitresses, quelles sont les séductions nouvelles qu’elle apportait avec elle, qui lui ont valu sa vogue et sa popularité?”<sup>47</sup> Auzende then answers his own question, identifying exoticism as the new element that David introduced into French music.<sup>48</sup>

To be sure, French composers (such as Rameau and Grétry) had long been interested in exoticism, even before the time of David. But it was David who developed a code for representing exoticism musically—a set of musical markers

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<sup>45</sup>“ We should consider Félicien David one of the principal initiators of the modern French school, as he had a profound influence on the grand musical movement that has been produced among us.” A.M. Auzende, “Félicien David,” in *Le Ménestrel* 60 (1894): 260.

<sup>46</sup> “...one of the most exquisite inspirations for our national music.” Victor Loret, “L’Orientalisme Dans la Musique Française,” in *Pour la Musique Française* (Paris: Editions Georges Cres et Compagnie, 1917): 154.

<sup>47</sup> “What are therefore the masterful qualities, what are the new seductions that his music brought with it, which have earned him his vogue and his popularity?” Auzende, “Félicien David,” 260.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

that signified “Easternness.” David’s interest in the Orient began in 1833, when he traveled to Egypt with the Saint-Simonians, a group of French socialists who were searching for enlightenment in the East. During his two years in Egypt, David developed an avid interest in non-Western music and began working on a series of compositions that evoked his impressions of the East.<sup>49</sup>

Shortly after returning to France in 1835, David published a collection of Egyptian folk songs, freely arranged for piano solo, but, as Ralph Locke observes, this work sold very few copies and failed to garner any attention.<sup>50</sup> But David’s second exotic work, *Le Désert* (1844) was destined to fare quite differently. *Le Désert* became an overnight sensation in France, and remained popular for almost a century after its premiere. In fact, it shaped the course of French music and inaugurated the French tradition of exoticism.

Its popularity may have derived in part from David’s choice of subject matter. Beginning in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, the desert became a potent symbol of French colonial ambitions. John Zarobell points out that many 19<sup>th</sup>-century French Orientalist paintings feature desert scenes.<sup>51</sup> The desert, he argues, represented the perceived “desolation and infertility” of the Orient while “simultaneously representing the power of (European) society and progress to restore the desert to a mythical former time of prosperity.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, by choosing the desert as his main theme, Felicien David tapped into a tradition that was already thriving in French

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<sup>49</sup> Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers,” 112-113.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>51</sup> John Zarobell, “Remaking the Landscape of Colonial Algeria,” *Modern Art and the Idea of the Mediterranean*, ed. Vojtěch Jirat-Wasivtyński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 65.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

visual culture: the depiction of the non-Western world as barren and primitive. This depiction serves to justify French colonial ambitions.

Shaped by Western stereotypes and imperialistic attitudes, *Le Désert* is not an ethnomusicological document. Before examining its musical portrayals of alterity, we must remind ourselves that the exotic markers found in this work (and in many other works by French composers) bear very little relationship to actual non-Western musical traditions. Although David was intimately familiar with Eastern music, owing to his extended stay in Egypt, *Le Désert* is a fanciful evocation of a Western man's impressions of the East. Indeed, the aspects of David's work that captivated the public were not his quotations of authentic folk material, sprinkled throughout *Le Désert*. It was the element of fantasy that appealed to audiences.

Fin-de-siècle French musicologist Albert Lavignac observes that David "fut un musicien orientaliste; non parce qu'il introduisit dans quelques-uns de ses ouvrages des motifs réellement orientaux, ce que tous peuvent faire, mais bien plutôt par la couleur spéciale ou la tournure d'esprit qui résulta d'une habitation de près de trois ans en Égypte, dont il rapporta un style oriental *de convention*, mais produisant à merveille l'impression exotique cherchée pour des oreilles d'Européens, leur donnant l'illusion de l'Orient."<sup>53</sup> Lavignac observes that David's music brings us, not the real Orient, but an impression—indeed, even an illusion—of the Orient.

And this, for Lavignac, is the reason why David's music is so appealing and

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<sup>53</sup> "...was an Orientalist musician; not because he introduced real oriental motives into some of his works, which anyone could do, but because of the special color or the attitude that resulted from his stay of almost three years in Egypt, from which he brought back an oriental style based on convention, but producing a marvelous impression of exoticism upon the ears of Europeans, and giving them the illusion of the Orient." Albert Lavignac, *La Musique et les Musiciens* (Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1895), 532.

captivating. That is, Lavignac asserts that the appeal of David's music lies in its fictive nature, in its dreamlike evocation of foreign lands.

I will begin this chapter with an analysis of David's *Désert*, examining the exotic markers that he developed, and exploring the ways in which he used these markers to conjure up an imaginative portrayal of the East. I will then discuss the French tradition of exoticism that was founded by David, a tradition that encompasses many major French composers such as Berlioz, Lalo, Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Delibes, and Debussy himself. Through discussing the exotic works of these composers, I aim to demonstrate that exoticism is an integral part of French musical culture. Indeed, as I hope to show, it became a musical tradition that shaped 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century music in France. I will pay particular attention to the exotic markers used by French composers, for such markers constitute a uniquely French vocabulary of exoticism. The French obsession with exoticism is the first of the three strands that I examine throughout this dissertation. In later chapters, we will discover how French exoticism is tied to the other two strands: nationalism and anti-Wagnerism.

Scholars have overlooked the importance of the French tradition of exoticism, although many aspects of musical exoticism have been thoroughly explored. In fact, musical exoticism has become an active field of inquiry within the past several years. Gary Tomlinson's 2007 book *The Singing of the New World* addresses, among other things, Western representations of indigenous musics;<sup>54</sup> Michael Pisani's *Imagining Native America in Music* (2005) examines musical evocations of

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<sup>54</sup> Gary Tomlinson, *The Singing of the New World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Native America from Lully to the present day;<sup>55</sup> Timothy Taylor's *Beyond Exoticism* (2007) seeks to nuance and contextualize the concept of musical exoticism;<sup>56</sup> Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon's 2007 anthology *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s-1940s* addresses musical exoticism within the context of Britain's imperial power.<sup>57</sup> Ralph P. Locke's *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (2009) offers a historical survey of musical exoticism, tracing its conventions and cultural meanings through various countries, genres, and time periods.<sup>58</sup> In addition to book-length studies, numerous recent articles have treated the subject of musical exoticism; one such article is "Camille Saint-Saëns' Changing Exoticism and the Interesting Case of *La Foi*," published in the *Journal of Musicological Research* in 2006.<sup>59</sup>

Although scholars have not extensively explored the French tradition of exoticism, they have mentioned it in passing. Locke, for instance, writes that "Well into the twentieth century, France was to remain the center of Middle Eastern evocation (e.g. Saint-Saëns, Ravel) and perhaps of musical exoticism generally (e.g. Messiaen), no doubt in large part because of the country's unique position as both a major musical center (along with Germany and Italy) and a major colonial power."<sup>60</sup> Locke, however, does not develop this argument; he acknowledges the

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon, *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s-1940s: Portrayal of the East* (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>59</sup> Lynne Johnson, "Camille Saint-Saëns' Changing Exoticism and the Interesting Case of *La Foi*," in *Journal of Musicological Research* 25:1 (January-March 2006): 75-95.

<sup>60</sup> Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers," 38.

existence of a French tradition, but he does not trace its history or its cultural significance. I enrich his work by probing deeply into the issues that were at stake (such as nationalism and anti-Wagnerism) when French composers represented the Other musically.

### *Exotic Markers in Le Désert*

Félicien David's *Le Désert* is replete with exotic signifiers, codifying an exotic vocabulary that was to be used (with modifications and additions) for the remainder of the century. The exotic musical style is signaled from the outset of the work, which opens with a long-held pedal tone, signifying the vastness and monotony of the desert<sup>61</sup>—but also, I would add, signifying the timeless primitivism associated with the Orient. The static quality of the music is intensified by the choir's repeated invocations of Allah, sung on a single repeated pitch. The overall effect is one of stasis, immobility, and grandeur.

The most strikingly exotic passage in the opening section occurs midway through the movement, where static harmonies and descending chromatic melodies are used in tandem to create a (pseudo-)Oriental flavor (ex. 1). In this passage, the singers—anchored by a tonic drone bass on F—continue their static chant, repeatedly proclaiming “Allah” on a repeated F. Here, the music contains chromatic ripples within an essentially static harmonic environment. The

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<sup>61</sup> This is how the opening section of *Le Désert* was heard in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, Camille Bellaigue, in 1893, writes that, in the opening section of *Le Désert*, “Comme la monotonie de l'accompagnement correspond à la monotonie du désert!” (How the monotony of the accompaniment corresponds to the monotony of the desert). Camille Bellaigue, *Psychologie Musicale* (Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1893), 134.



harmonies undulate back and forth. The pattern starts with a minor tonic chord, followed by V/IV-IV-iv-I. There is no real sense of progression. The overall effect is one of harmonic stasis, with the music constantly cycling back to the tonic chord, and the singers (along with the drone bass) incessantly repeating the tonic pitch F. Thus, David creates a static soundscape colored by chromatic inflections.

Part I of *Le Désert*, then, depicts the immobile grandeur of the desert. Part II, on the other hand, paints a more sensual picture of Oriental life. The “Danse des Almées,” occurring in Part II, evokes almées—Eastern belly dancers—performing a seductive dance (ex. 2). The graceful turns of the melodic line can be heard as a musical portrait of the sinuous motions of a belly dancer, as Locke observes.<sup>62</sup> The curvaceous melody is given to a solo oboe, adding to the exotic coloring of the passage.

David’s use of the oboe offers an example of non-Western influence mixed with Western bias. David traveled to Egypt. While there, he heard the Mijwiz, an Arab wind instrument. Its nasal timbre reminded him of the oboe.<sup>63</sup> As a result, he peppered his exotic works with oboe passages, seeking to conjure up the sound of the Mijwiz. But do these oboe passages resemble the music played on a Mijwiz? Not completely. The Mijwiz is a double reed instrument, capable of playing harmony and counterpoint. But David used unaccompanied oboe solos to evoke the sound of the Mijwiz. He erased the harmonic complexity of Mijwiz music. He was probably influenced by stereotypes of the primitive Orient. These stereotypes may

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<sup>62</sup> Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers,” 115.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

have prevented him from noticing the complexity of the actual music he heard in Egypt. David's erasure of harmony illustrates a key feature of Orientalism: Western composers have difficulty hearing non-Western music on its own terms. Their listening experience is shaped by their own preconceptions about the exotic Other.

As we will see later in this chapter, other French composers followed David's lead, assigning the oboe a prominent role in many exotic pieces. We will observe florid oboe passages in the exotic works of Massenet, Berlioz, Bizet, etc. The oboe soon became a standard timbral marker of exoticism. Should we consider this marker to be authentic or invented? I believe that it is both. It was somewhat authentic when David used it, because he'd heard the actual Arab instrument in context. But it was less authentic in the hands of other composers. They probably hadn't heard the original instrument. They'd only heard David's imitation of it. So they were imitating his imitation.

The image shows a musical score for Félicien David's *Le Désert, Première Partie* (1844). The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in French, with lyrics: "seul don - nes la mort, Al - lah, Al - lah, Al -" and "du al - lein den Tod, Al - lah, Al - lah, Al -". The piano accompaniment features a prominent oboe-like melody in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The score is in B-flat major and 4/4 time.

Example 1. Félicien David, *Le Désert*, Première Partie (1844)



Example 2. Félicien David, *Le Désert*, Danse des Almées (1844)

In his thorough study of the history of the oboe, Geoffrey Burgess observes that, by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century “the oboe became one of the most characteristic oriental sonorities. In addition to its purported origins amongst the same cultures that the West labeled Oriental, its feminine associations made the oboe doubly appropriate to these contexts.”<sup>64</sup> Burgess’ remark about the “feminine associations” of the oboe is relevant here, because the oboe solo in “Danse des Almées” conjures up not only the Orient, but also a certain type of seductive femininity. This coupling of the exotic and the feminine is something that we shall encounter again and again in subsequent exotic works.

In “Danse des Almées,” the sinuous oboe melody is accompanied by a rhythmic ostinato. This static pattern evokes (as does Part I of *Le Désert*) the purported timelessness of the orient.<sup>65</sup> Static ostinato figures reappear near the end of Part II, in “La Rêverie du Soir,” a haunting musical number in which the tenor

<sup>64</sup> Geoffrey Burgess, *The Oboe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 238.

<sup>65</sup> Susan McClary persuasively argues that, in exotic pieces, “the static bass lines of much of this music betray a Western belief in the timelessness, the lack of interest in progress among ‘Orientals.’” McClary, *Carmen* 55.



Example 3. Félicien David, *Le Désert*, La Rêverie du Soir (1844) mm. 1-10

soloist and men's chorus sing rapturously of the erotic pleasures of the night. A repeated ostinato figure, based on an open fifth with scale degrees 1 and 5, thrums hypnotically beneath the sensual, caressing melody. This ostinato figure persists throughout the entire 49-bar song. (ex. 3, mm. 1-10) Once again, the timelessness of the orient (as well as the timeless, dreamlike mood associated with nighttime) is portrayed through the repetition of ostinato figures.

Part III opens with a musical depiction of sunrise, featuring a murmuring ostinato which (like so many other sections of this work) underscores the representation of the orient as timeless. The pastoral "sunrise" section is followed by an intoxicatingly exotic portrayal of a muezzin—a Muslim holy man who calls

CHANT DU MUEZZIM.  
GESANG DES MUEZZIM.

El — Salam a — lek, a — leikoum el Sa — lam,  
El — Salam a — lek, a — leikoum el Sa — lam,

Adagio. ♩ = 48.

Al — lah hou ak — bar ia les Sa — lah la Al — lah il  
Al — lah hou ak — bar ia les Sa — lah la Al — lah il

Example 4. Félicien David, *Le Désert*, Chant du Muezzim (1844)

the faithful to prayer. Several fragments of Arabic are incorporated into the text, intensifying the illusion of verisimilitude. The muezzin's call is sung to a melismatic modal melody, which (combined with the Arabic sprinkled throughout the text) imbues the music with Otherness (ex. 4). The melody is in a modal B minor, with the seventh scale degree consistently lowered to create an Aeolian inflection. Much of the melody revolves around descending minor tetrachords that contain the lowered seventh scale degree. Prominent melismas underscore the

distinctly exotic tone of the melody. For instance, there is an extended melisma toward the end of the movement.

Exoticism also colors the accompanying harmonies; the chord on the second beat of m. 3, for instance, is built on the lowered seventh scale degree, intensifying the Aeolian flavor of the music. The lowered supertonic appears in the chords in mm. 6, 11, and 14, coloring the music with a Phrygian inflection.

In sum: *Le Désert* is, as we have discovered, shot through with exotic markers. Let us briefly list the markers that we have encountered in this work: static harmonies and rhythms, descending chromatic lines, modality, melismatic figures, and unusual timbres (especially oboe solo). We shall soon see that these features reappear, again and again, in exotic works throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for they became stock elements in the exotic musical vocabulary used in France. But we will also see that subsequent composers, such as Bizet, enriched this vocabulary, contributing new exotic markers (such as augmented seconds) that are not found in David's *Désert*. Before we turn to Berlioz, the next composer in our survey, I'd like to present a brief definition of some of the main exotic features that we will encounter throughout the remainder of the chapter. We've already noted some of these features in Debussy's *Soirée* and *Nuages*, and in David's *Désert*; it is time now to take stock of them and define them.

## *Exotic Musical Markers Defined*

### *Modality*

Before the advent of functional tonality (which occurred, roughly speaking, in the mid-to-late 16<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>66</sup>, mode was one of the main organizational principles of Western art music. The role of modality in pre-tonal music is complex and varied; mode as an organizing principle coexisted and interacted with other systems such as hexachords, and the definition and function of modality varies with the work, time period, region, and composer. Further complicating the situation, medieval and Renaissance music theorists' definitions of mode are not always consistent with the actual compositional practice of the period. Due in part to such contradictions and inconsistencies, the meaning of the term *mode* is slippery and ambiguous; in fact, some scholars—most notably Harold Powers in his 1992 article “Is Mode Real?”—have even questioned the relevance or usefulness of the term *mode* as a descriptive tool for pre-tonal music.<sup>67</sup> Powers' polemical article provoked a variety of responses from scholars; Frans Weiring, for example, responded to Powers' question by arguing that mode *was* in fact a real—but highly complicated—aspect of early music. As Weiring writes, “For [the Renaissance music theorist Aron] and his contemporaries the ‘reality’ of the modes as such was beyond question. The problem is rather which form this reality assumed under

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<sup>66</sup> There are many debates concerning the date of the emergence of tonality; these debates stem in part from varying definitions of tonality.

<sup>67</sup> Harold S. Powers, “Is Mode Real? Pietro Aron, the Octenary System, and Polyphony,” in *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis* 16 (1992): 9-52.

different circumstances.”<sup>68</sup> The function of modality in pre-tonal music is, therefore, a complicated and controversial topic, which has received much scholarly attention.

It is, however, beyond the scope of this project for me to undertake an investigation of this function. My focus is not on medieval or Renaissance music; instead, I focus in this section on 19<sup>th</sup>-century modal music. In this repertoire, the definition and function of modality is much more straightforward and easily defined. Whereas mode was (at least according to some scholars) a highly complex and variable organizing principle in pre-tonal music, it serves a much simpler function in 19<sup>th</sup>-century music. It serves primarily as a local—and usually temporary—deviation from major and minor scales. For example, the Dorian mode is usually treated, in 19<sup>th</sup>-century music, as a minor scale with a chromatically altered sixth degree; similarly, the Lydian mode functioned as a major scale with a raised fourth degree. Indeed, as Dahlhaus points out, “In the nineteenth century, ecclesiastical modes were not perceived as they once were; instead, they represented enticing modifications of major and minor. The very terms applied to them betray how they were misunderstood: concepts such as the ‘Dorian sixth,’ ‘Lydian fourth,’ or ‘Mixolydian seventh’ were unknown in the sixteenth century, since, in the original Dorian mode, the third or seventh degrees were no less characteristic than the sixth. These terms were merely labels for those degrees that distinguished the modes from major or minor keys, to which they were

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<sup>68</sup> Frans Wiering, “Internal and External Views of the Modes,” *Tonal Structures in Early Music*, ed. Christle Collins Judd (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 88.



automatically related rather than standing on their own.”<sup>69</sup> That is, instead of serving a structural function (as they had in earlier music), modes tended to be used as decorative, colorful elements in 19<sup>th</sup>-century music.

Indeed, modality, at least in exotic music, often functioned primarily as local color, exerting little influence on the deeper musical structure. As Susan McClary observes, “The characteristic pitch deviations in Orientalist music rarely penetrate below the surface of what otherwise is a thoroughly Western musical configuration....Modal references may occur...but genuine modal procedures remain irrelevant.”<sup>70</sup> By “genuine modal procedures” McClary presumably is referring to the modal procedures of pre-tonal music—procedures that differ markedly from the much simpler 19<sup>th</sup>-century view of modality.

### *Descending Chromatic Lines*

A prominent feature of much exotic music is, as Derek Scott aptly calls it, “sliding or sinuous chromaticism.”<sup>71</sup> This sinuous chromaticism often takes the form of a descending chromatic line. That is, melodies based primarily on descending half-steps, especially when paired with other exotic markers, connote an exotic context. In fact, Taruskin observes that “it is the descending chromatic line—neither iconically nor stylistically verisimilar, but a badge worn by exotic sexpots all over Europe (only connect with a certain Habanera)—that completes the picture

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<sup>69</sup> Dahlhaus 311.

<sup>70</sup> McClary, *Carmen* 54-55.

<sup>71</sup> Derek B. Scott, “Orientalism and Musical Style,” *Musical Quarterly* 82:2 (1998): 309-335.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 165.

of the seductive East.”<sup>72</sup> The Habanera to which he parenthetically refers is from Bizet’s exotic opera *Carmen*, which will be examined later in this chapter.

*Stasis: Pedal Points, Drones, and Ostinatos*

Musical exoticism often makes extensive use of stasis; as I will show, drones and ostinatos pervade most exotic pieces. Why is stasis so prevalent in exotic works? Exotic peoples are often thought to be incapable of progress, living in a time warp; the static harmonies of many exotic works reflect this stereotype. Lawrence Kramer observes that “one of the primary qualities of the exotic” was “its supposed preservation of values that the advanced cultures of Europe had superseded. When Europeans consumed the cultures of distant places, they could glimpse the thrilling secrets of their own origins in distant times. This view of the exotic as a kind of living museum thrived in low and high culture alike.”<sup>73</sup>

Bernard McGrane situates this view in its historical context; he argues that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “there occurred a vast hemorrhage in time: geological time, evolutionary time, developmental time lodged itself between the European and the non-European Other. Anthropology came into being. It organized and administered the comparison between past and present, between different ‘stages of development,’ between the prehistorically fossilized ‘primitive’ and the

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<sup>73</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 206.

evolutionary advancement of modern Western science and civilization.”<sup>74</sup> This change in the Western conception of non-Western cultures meant that “the ‘world’ also, which had hitherto been everywhere contemporary with itself, became partitioned off into different times, different epochs, and much of it was seen as a living museum.”<sup>75</sup>

Anthropologists were not the only ones to view the non-Western world as a living museum. Edward Said asserts that, in Western thought, “the very possibility of development, transformation, human movement—in the deepest sense of the word—is denied the Orient and the Oriental. As a known and ultimately an immobilized or unproductive quality, they come to be identified with a bad sort of eternity; hence, when the Orient is being approved, such phrases as ‘the wisdom of the East.’”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Hegel, one of the most influential 19<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers, exemplifies the Western tendency to cast the Orient as static and immobile. Hegel claims that Africa “is an unhistorical continent, with no movement or development of its own.” According to him, “The condition in which they [Africans] live is incapable of any development or culture, and their present existence is the same as it has always been.”<sup>77</sup>

Hegel is not quite as dismissive of India as he is of Africa, but he nevertheless perceives Indian culture as static. Partha Mitter notes that “paradoxically, his [Hegel’s] dynamic principle of history, the dialectics of change, only helped to

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<sup>74</sup> Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), x.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>76</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 208.

<sup>77</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 190.

establish a fundamentally static image of Indian art, its immemorial immutability, its unchanging irrationality, all predetermined by the peculiar Indian national spirit.” She adds that, for Hegel, Indian art “was thus condemned to remain always outside history, static, immobile, and fixed for all eternity.”<sup>78</sup>

Given the widespread view of exotic lands as living museums, untouched by the passage of time, it is no wonder that exotic pieces are often static. As Susan McClary writes, “The structures of Orientalist pieces are usually simplistic, since complex formal processes are counted among the unique accomplishments of the West. The static bass lines of much of this music betray a Western belief in the timelessness, the lack of interest in progress among ‘Orientals.’”<sup>79</sup>

The stereotype of exotic music as primitive and static was prevalent in France. The French composer Raoul Laparra (1876-1943) praised Spanish music for what he perceived as its charming primitivism. He writes that the Spanish composer is an “orphan who does not know anything and who, thanks to his ignorance, climbs up to the summit of Beauty in a single leap.”<sup>80</sup> As Llano points out, “Laparra’s Spanish noble savage is a critical concoction partly aimed at reinforcing stereotypes about Spain being savage and backward on the one hand, but also ‘pure’ and untainted by corruption and commercialization on the other.”<sup>81</sup>

In fact, Laparra deplored what he saw as signs of modernization in Spanish culture, indicating that he wanted Spain to remain entirely static and undeveloped.

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<sup>78</sup> Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 218.

<sup>79</sup> McClary, *Carmen*, 55.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Samuel Llano, *Whose Spain? Negotiating “Spanish Music” in Paris, 1908-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

He wrote that modern fashions were “bringing the often unfortunate benefits of ‘development’ to the solitary kingdom [Spain].”<sup>82</sup> As Llano notes, “By way of this attack on fashion, Laparra reinforces Spain’s alleged backwardness, thus helping to shape constructions of the Spaniard as a savage.”<sup>83</sup> Laparra’s pleas for Spain to remain undeveloped suggest that the stereotype of exotic cultures as static was deeply ingrained in French culture.

Revuluri astutely observes that these stereotypes shaped the ways in which non-Western musicians were presented at the World’s Fair, which took place in 1889 in Paris. She points out that these musicians were required to perform the same pieces day after day. “Often concerts were played over and over again; they were live events, but they were treated as static ones.”<sup>84</sup> By portraying non-Western performances as repetitive and unchanging, the World’s Fair both reflected and reinforced the view that non-Western cultures are frozen in time.

Western evocations of musical exoticism also perform this double function. Through a heavy use of static musical patterns, these evocations reflect and perpetuate the stereotype of non-Western cultures as static. In a discussion of exotic musical markers, Ralph Locke points out how Western composers express stereotypical views of the Orient: “This figure—equal-value repeated notes on a single pitch—does not derive from musical traditions of the Middle East. Rather, it is an invented device that, when played against a long-held pedal tone, evokes qualities long imputed to Middle-Eastern societies by people in Europe and North

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Revuluri, *Exoticism and Absorption*, 42.

America: stasis and rigid (perhaps ritualistic) repetition rather than forward movement and flexible growth.”<sup>85</sup>

### *Pentatonicism*

My understanding of pentatonicism is profoundly indebted to Jeremy Day-O’Connell’s book *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy*.<sup>86</sup> Pentatonicism is a musical signifier that appears in a variety of contexts; like stasis, it can signify either exoticism (especially the Far East) or the pastoral style. As Day-O’Connell points out, pentatonicism can even be used to evoke a dream-like sense of unreality, representing an Arcadian space that exists only in fantasy. Day-O’Connell writes, “Conversely, pastoral pentatonicism’s domestic origins should not obscure the fact of its own potential exoticism, which is to say, its opposition to the mundane realities of urban European life...Such transcendence can also result when the childish fantasy-world of lullaby is equated with the patently unreal experience of dreaming: in fact, the ironic pentatonicism of Schubert’s *Winterreise* mentioned above coincides almost entirely with references to dreams. In each case, pentatonicism serves as a mechanism not for *literal* transport, but for something more fundamental, the blissful suspension of reality.”<sup>87</sup> We will encounter examples of the “Arcadian” use of pentatonicism later in this chapter, particularly in the works of Saint-Saëns and Debussy.

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<sup>85</sup> Ralph P. Locke, “Unacknowledged Exoticism in Debussy: The Incidental Music for *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*,” *The Musical Quarterly* (2007: 90), 399.

<sup>86</sup> Jeremy Day-O’Connell, *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

### *Berlioz: Les Troyens*

Let us now turn to the exotic music of one of David's greatest admirers, Hector Berlioz, to examine the ways in which he drew on (*and* built on) the set of markers developed by David. As an admirer of David's works, Berlioz naturally took up the mantle of musical exoticism and cultivated it in his own works. Berlioz's opera *Les Troyens* (1858), based on Virgil's tale of the fall of Troy, includes three exotic dances. Annegret Fauser observes that "the three dances could serve as a *locus classicus* of musical representations of race and gender in nineteenth-century French opera."<sup>88</sup> The first dance, "Pas des Almées," portrays Egyptian dancing girls; the title of this dance is perhaps based on David's "Danse des Almées," a movement of *Le Désert* discussed above.<sup>89</sup> Already we have an indication that musical exoticism is largely a matter of one French composer imitating the exotic works of other French composers, rather than drawing on genuine non-Western sources. The musical style of "Pas des Almées," too, is indebted to David. Featuring a slithery chromatic line over a lilting drone bass (ex. 5), the first phrase of this dance recalls the opening section of *Le Désert*, in which descending chromatic lines were underpinned by a drone bass. Inge van Rij observes that Berlioz's "Danse des Almées" also bears a strong resemblance to a ballet by the

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<sup>88</sup> Annegret Fauser, "Visual Pleasures—Musical Signs: Dance at the Paris Opera," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104:1 (Winter 2005): 106.

<sup>89</sup> Julian Rushton points out that "A likely source for the title is David's 'Danse des almées.'" Julian Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145.

No. 33 Ballets	Nr. 33 Ballette
a. Pas des Almées	a. Tanz der ägyptischen Tänzerinnen

Lento quasi adagio (♩ = 120)

Example 5. Hector Berlioz, *Les Troyens*, Pas des Almées (1858)

French composer Auber;<sup>90</sup> this resemblance, I would add, underscores the extent to which French composers drew on each other's works, not on non-Western music, when writing exotic pieces.

The final dance, entitled “Pas d’Esclaves Nubiennes,” is the most strikingly exotic of the three. A drone bass on the tonic E persists throughout, sounding relentlessly during the entire 104-bar piece (ex. 6). Berlioz’s insistent repetition of a drone bass brings to mind a similar passage in *Le Désert*, the “Rêverie du Soir,” which similarly featured a drone-like figure, repeated throughout the entire piece. Again, we are reminded that exoticism is intertextual; French composers tend to model their exotic works on French sources, not non-Western sources (this is also something that we encountered in the introduction, in which I demonstrated that Debussy’s *Soirée* was based on two earlier French works by Chabrier and Ravel). To further intensify the exotic flavor of the Nubian dance, Berlioz uses unusual percussion instruments—a tambourine and tarbuka (a type of Turkish drum). These

<sup>90</sup> Inge van Rij, “‘There is no anachronism’: Indian Dancing Girls in Ancient Carthage in Berlioz’s *Les Troyens*,” *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music*, 33:1 (2009): 15.



c. Pas d'Esclaves Nubiennes      c. Tanz der nubischen Sklavinnen

**Allegro vivace** (♩ = 144)  
(assises à terre)  
Contraltos (auf dem Boden sitzend)

4 ESCLAVES  
NUBIENNES

Tambourin à l'orchestre  
et Tarbuka sur la scène \*)

(pizz.)

6

Es.

Example 6. Hector Berlioz, *Les Troyens*, Pas d'Esclaves Nubiennes (1858)

two instruments play a simple ostinato rhythm throughout the entire piece, reinforcing the static, monotonous quality of the accompaniment.

The dance has a strong Phrygian flavor, due to Berlioz' heavy use of F-natural within an E minor context. The use of modal scales for exotic color is something that we have already observed in David's *Le Désert*, particularly in the call of the Muezzin. But Berlioz's use of modality is even more pronounced and prominent than David's. Berlioz hews closely to the diatonic scale of E Phrygian, using very

few non-diatonic tones, whereas David introduced several chromatic tones into the Muezzin's call, which weakened the modal flavor somewhat.

The sung text of this dance number is significant and telling, for it is, as Inge van Rij observes, "in a wholly invented language whose only criteria is that it is 'other.'"<sup>91</sup> The inauthenticity of this language illustrates the essentially fictive quality of exoticism; reflecting Berlioz's indifference to actual exotic customs and traditions.<sup>92</sup> Parts of the sung text feature wordless vocals, which adds to the Oriental character of the music (vocalization without words is an exotic marker that I will take up more fully in my discussion of Delibes' exotic opera *Lakmé*, in which wordless vocals become a prominent feature of *Lakmé*'s main aria).

What we have learned from examining Berlioz's exotic dances, then, is that exoticism is largely a matter of convention, in which French composers imitate each other, and non-Western musical procedures remain largely irrelevant. We have seen that Berlioz draws on several of the exotic markers established by David—modality, stasis, unusual timbral effects, and descending chromatic lines. We sense already that the exotic tradition is self-referential; that is, the tradition is based largely on one French composer referring back to the works of other French composers.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>92</sup> Berlioz was indifferent to—indeed, even repulsed by—genuine non-Western music. See Rij, "Indian Dancing Girls," 12-13, for a discussion of Berlioz's disdainful attitude to non-Western music.

### ***Bizet: Nietzsche's Favorite Exoticist***

Georges Bizet (1838-1875) was obsessed with exoticism. Many of his operatic works are set in exotic locales: *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (1863) in Ceylon, *Djamileh* (1873) in the Middle East, and his celebrated opera *Carmen* is set in Spain and features a gypsy as the main character. The music of Bizet's operas is no less exotic than the settings. Bizet drew heavily upon the set of exotic markers established by David, but he also enriched and elaborated this set of markers, making use of exotic tropes (such as augmented seconds and Spanish dance rhythms) that David had not used.

Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, one of his earliest ventures into operatic exoticism, puts many of these features on display. *Les Pêcheurs* is a heady tale of forbidden love and transgressive sexuality. The protagonist, Leila, is a virgin priestess who has promised upon pain of death to remain chaste. But she disobeys her vows, succumbing to temptation with the handsome Nadir. She and Nadir are caught in the act by a priest, Nourabad, who turns them in to the authorities for their sinful behavior. The tribal chief, Zurga, sentences both lovers to death—but finally pardons them in the end, because he himself is in love with Leila and does not want her to die. This tale offers all the steamy elements beloved to 19<sup>th</sup>-century French audiences: forbidden sexuality, an enticingly exotic setting, and transgressive love. And, of course, it also offers alluring, exotic music. Locke observes that “so

magically Other is the music that it seems a perfect complement to what is more an erotic fantasy than any kind of even remotely realistic depiction.”<sup>93</sup>

Nadir’s *Romance*, opening with an exotically tinged Phrygian melody for solo oboe, illustrates the magical Otherness of Bizet’s music (ex. 7, mm. 1-16). Locke observes that, in this aria, “the melody line (taken by the solo oboe, then the lyric tenor) hangs obsessively around the dominant and lowered sixth and seventh degrees to such an extent that it seems to form an independent compositional layer in E Phrygian over the more conventionally tonal A minor accompaniment.”<sup>94</sup> The modal orientation of this melody, combined with the exotic color of the oboe, imparts a distinctly exotic flavor to the music. Later in the same act, Nadir and Leila sing a love duet, entitled *Chanson*: this song, like *Romance*, similarly opens with a Phrygian melody for oboe, replete with delicate arabesques suggesting an air of perfumed exoticism (ex. 8, mm. 1-7). Bizet’s heavy use of modal oboe solos throughout *Pêcheurs* imbues the work with an exotic tone.

Bizet’s *Djamileh*, composed ten years later, illustrates many of the same features. Based on *Namouna*, an Orientalist novella by the French author Alfred de Musset, this opera tells the story of Djamileh, a Middle Eastern slave girl. Its most exotic number is “L’Almée.” This number strongly resembles the almée dances by David and Berlioz, discussed above. Like these dances, Bizet’s almée dance features a tonic drone on an open fifth over which an arabesque-like melody unfolds (ex. 9). Syncopated rhythms add to the exotic flavor. The serpentine melody is

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<sup>93</sup> Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers,” 119.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 120.

(B) ROMANCE.

Andante.

NADIR.

-ce —

Andante. (♩=60)

PIANO.

pp

M.D. ten.

NADIR.

*p*

Je crois — entendre en-co — re ca.

Example 7. Georges Bizet, *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, Romance (1863), mm. 1-16

based largely on descending chromatic figures, an exotic marker that we have already encountered in David and Berlioz. It is worth reminding ourselves at this juncture that none of these features are necessarily found in actual non-Western music; rather, they are Western techniques that (to a Western ear) give the illusion

# CHANSON.

№ 8.

Andante.

LÉILA.

NADIR.  
(dans la coulisse)

Andante.  $\text{♩} = 52$

PIANO.

*f* *p* *f*

NADIR. (de très loin.) *ppp*

Demon a-mi - e Fleur en dor -

*dim.* *pp* *pp* (Harpe dans la coulisse.)

N<sub>4</sub>

- mi - e -

Example 8. Georges Bizet, *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, Chanson (1863), mm. 1-7

**L'ALMÉE**  
**DANSE ET CHŒUR**  
**Nº 7 ORIENTAL DANCE AND CHORUS**

*Andantino quasi andante*

Soprani  
(Esclaves et musiciens)  
(Slaves and musicians)

Ténors  
(Amis d'Haroun)  
(Haroun's friends)

Basses

Piano *pp*

*Andantino quasi andante* ♩ = 63

Basses *pp*

Froide et len - te,  
Gli - ding cold - ly,

In - do - len - te, Et les yeux as - sou - pis, — —  
Wri - thing bold - ly, La - zi - ty her eyes close. — —

Example 9. Georges Bizet, *Djamileh*, Oriental Dance and Chorus (1872), mm. 1-10

of Otherness. In fact, Dahlhaus cites Bizet's "L'Alm  e" as an example of the inauthenticity of exoticism.<sup>95</sup>

We turn now to Bizet's most famous exotic work, his celebrated opera *Carmen* (1875). *Carmen* was at the height of its popularity during Debussy's lifetime. Initially a box-office failure when it opened in France in 1875, *Carmen* had become a box-office hit by the late 1880's. Thus, at the time when the young Debussy was beginning to reach compositional maturity, *Carmen* was taking the French musical public by storm. As McClary points out, "Within ten years of its premiere, *Carmen* had won an international place in the standard opera repertory. As its international success soared, even the French retracted their initial judgment, and the opera returned in triumph to the Opera-Comique."<sup>96</sup> In fact, by 1889, *Carmen* had been performed 400 times at the Opera-Comique.<sup>97</sup> Debussy himself saw *Carmen* on at least one occasion, when he attended a performance of *Carmen* as Brahms' guest in Vienna in the late 1880's or early 1890's.<sup>98</sup> In a 1906 article, Debussy expressed his admiration for *Carmen*: "Bizet died too soon, and although he bequeathed to us one masterpiece, the fate of French music was still left undecided."<sup>99</sup> In this passage, Debussy implies that Bizet played a central role in shaping the fate of French music. This role, I will argue, was closely tied to Bizet's heavy use of exoticism. Along similar lines, Saint-Sa  ns accorded Bizet a prominent position in

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<sup>95</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 306.

<sup>96</sup> Susan McClary, *Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 120.

<sup>97</sup> Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 59.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew de Ternant, "Debussy and Brahms," *The Musical Times* 64:977 (July 1924): 608-609.

<sup>99</sup> Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, 225.



the French school; he asserts that Bizet gave France “cinq ou six chefs-d’oeuvre, qui seraient maintenant la gloire de l’École française.”<sup>100</sup>

But I focus on Bizet throughout this chapter not only because his opera *Carmen* was enormously popular in Debussy’s France, but also because Bizet was extremely important to Nietzsche, who viewed *Carmen* as an exotic antidote to Wagner. As I will argue in Chapter 3, Debussy was influenced by Nietzsche’s anti-Wagnerian writings, especially *Case of Wagner* (1888). Indeed, Nietzsche’s writings on Bizet could well have been the stimulus that sparked Debussy’s interest in musical exoticism. Bizet is therefore a key player in the Nietzsche-Debussy connection that I explore in Chapters 3 and 4.

*Carmen*, like the other two operas by Bizet examined above, makes liberal use of exotic markers. But, in addition to the standard set of exotic markers, *Carmen* also makes use of some specifically Spanish (or pseudo-Spanish) markers. The famous “Habanera” from *Carmen* offers a prime example of the opera’s Spanish-tinged exoticism. The habanera is a dance genre with strong ties to Spain. Originating in early 18<sup>th</sup>-century Spain, the habanera was initially a kind of Spanish counterpart to the English country dance. But the genre of the habanera underwent a transformation in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was transported to Cuba from Europe. Cuban musicians transformed the Habanera, adding syncopations, ostinatos, and dotted rhythms. These newly added characteristics were influenced in part by Haitian dance forms, which had taken hold in Cuba as a result of its

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<sup>100</sup> “...five or six masterpieces, which still remain the glory of the French school!” Camille Saint-Saëns, *Portraits et Souvenirs* (Paris: Société d’Édition Artistique, 1900), 127.

growing population of Haitian refugees. Thus, by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the Habanera was a deeply exotic genre, bearing the marks of many “exotic” cultures: Spain, Cuba, and even Haiti.<sup>101</sup>

It was at this point that the habanera was exported back to Europe, largely through the Spanish composer Sebastián Yradier, who encountered the habanera while traveling in Cuba and brought it back to Europe with him in 1840.<sup>102</sup> It immediately caught on as a popular dance in France, especially in “the Parisian cabaret scene, where exoticism was no less of a box office draw than in high art.”<sup>103</sup> As an exotic product of many cross-cultural influences, the habanera appealed to 19<sup>th</sup>-century French composers, who were eager consumers of all things exotic and foreign. Bizet was one of the first French composers to write a habanera; several other French composers followed suit, including Saint-Saëns and Chabrier.<sup>104</sup>

The genre of the habanera is marked by several characteristic features, including a “slow tempo, in duple meter with a suave and lilting rhythmic ostinato.”<sup>105</sup> Bizet’s habanera possesses these features; it also possesses a variety of other exotic markers (ex. 10). It makes heavy use of static bass figures, a now-familiar staple of most exotic works (familiar because we have encountered it in David, Berlioz, and in other works by Bizet as well). The melody is teasingly chromatic, slithering through a series of chromatic descents spanning an octave.

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<sup>101</sup> *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, “Habanera,” 2001.

<sup>102</sup> Susan McClary, *Carmen*, 51-52.

<sup>103</sup> Susan McClary, “Structures of Identity and Difference in Bizet’s *Carmen*,” *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, ed. Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 123.

<sup>104</sup> *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, “Habanera,” 2001.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

# Nº 5. Habanera.\*)

**Allegretto, quasi Andantino.** *p*

**Carmen.** *L'amour*  
*Love is*

**Sopranos I & II.**  
*(Cigarette-girls).*

**Tenors.**  
*(Young men).*

**Basses.**  
*(Workingmen).*

**Chorus.**

**Piano.** *Allegretto, quasi Andantino. (♩ = 72.)* *pp*

est un oi-seau re - bel-le Que nul ne peut ap-pri-voi - ser, Et c'est  
free as the way - ward breeze, - It can be shy, - it - can be bold. Love can

bien en vain qu'on l'ap - pel-le, S'il lui con - vient de re - fu - ser. Rien n'y  
fas-ci - nate, love can tease, - Its whims and moods are - thou-sand - fold. All at

fait, menace ou pri - è - re, L'un par - le bien, l'au-tre se tait; Et cest  
once it ar - rives and lin-gers For just how long - can't be fore - told. Then it

*portamento.*

*portamento.*

\*) Imitated from a Spanish song.

Example 10. Georges Bizet, *Carmen* (1875), mm. 1-16

The ostinato bass, paired with Carmen's provocative chromatic slides, creates a distinctly exotic sound-world. But this sound-world is not only exotic, it is also *erotic*. Eroticism is a central component of many exotic works, as we have already had occasion to observe in David's and Berlioz's *Almée* dances, in which curvaceous melodic figures offer a tantalizing portrayal of nubile dancing girls. Here, the eroticism is even more overt, for Carmen dances seductively as she sings, swaying her hips provocatively. Her melody is provocative as well, for she dwells teasingly on certain tones, drawing them out lazily in a distinctly erotic manner. Susan McClary observes that "she plays with our expectations not only by lingering, but also by reciting in irregular triplets that strain against the beat."<sup>106</sup>

The "Habanera" is not the only exotic dance piece found in *Carmen*. Toward the end of Act I, Carmen also performs a *seguidilla*, a type of Spanish dance associated with flamenco (ex. 11). Like the "Habanera," this number features a teasingly seductive melody. Here, a seductive effect is achieved through the use of saucy, flirtatious triplet figures in the vocal line. The modal ambiguity of the harmonies intensifies the exotic sound of the piece. Hovering between B minor and F-sharp Phrygian, the harmonies are teasingly ambiguous, flirting with various keys without ever confirming a solid tonal center until the final cadence.

If the "Habanera" and "Seguidilla" put Carmen's Spanishness on display, her gypsy identity, rather than her Spanishness, becomes the focus of the exotic number that opens Act II (ex. 12). Titled "Gypsy Song," this number features Carmen, along with several other gypsy women, singing and playing exotic instruments,

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<sup>106</sup> McClary, *Carmen*, 76.

*Carmen.* *pp e leggiero.*

Près des rem -  
Near to the

parts de Sé - vil - - le, Chez mon a -  
walls of Se - vil - - la, With my good

mi Lil - las Pas - tia J'i - rai dan - ser  
friend Lil - las Pas - tia I'll soon dance the

18117

Example 11. Georges Bizet, *Carmen* (1875), Seguidilla, mm. 10-21

such as the guitar and tambourine. We have already seen Berlioz make use of the tambourine in the “Danse des Esclaves” to portray African dancers; the same instrument is now used to portray gypsies, indicating that the tambourine is used to signify a variety of exotic cultures. The melody is laced with chromatic inflections, which provide a modal, exotic color. The frequent F-naturals in the melody, for instance, create a Phrygian inflection. Many of the melodic motives are based on descending minor tetrachords.

## Act II.

Lillas Pastia's Inn. When the curtain rises, Carmen, Frasquita, and Mercedes are discovered seated at a table with the officers. Dance of the Gypsy-girls, accompanied by Gypsies playing the guitar and tambourine.

## No 12. Gypsy Song.

Andantino.

Frasquita.  
Mercedes.

Carmen.

Andantino. (♩ = 100.)

Piano.

Curtain rises. (Dance.)

Example 12. Georges Bizet, *Carmen* (1875), Gypsy Song, mm. 1-8

Throughout the “Gypsy Song,” Bizet’s harmonic language is decidedly static, with a tonic drone on E underpinning much of the song. With regard to Bizet’s heavy use of stasis in this number, as well as in many other parts of *Carmen*, Susan McClary has observed that “the structures of [these numbers in *Carmen* and other] Orientalist pieces are usually simplistic, since complex formal processes are counted among the unique accomplishments of the West. The static bass lines of much of this music betray a Western belief in the timelessness, the lack of interest in progress among ‘Orientals.’”<sup>107</sup> McClary’s argument is cogent, because (as

<sup>107</sup> McClary, *Carmen*, 52.

discussed above) exotic cultures were viewed, by many 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europeans, as existing in a time warp, untouched by modernization and evolution. In light of this prevalent view, held by many of Bizet's contemporaries, it is reasonable to suppose that Bizet's use of static harmonies reflects (and perpetuates) the familiar trope of non-Western peoples as primitive and backward.

Locke, however, has challenged McClary's implicit claim that Bizet viewed non-Western cultures as timeless and primitive; he claims that Bizet did *not* hold any racist, patronizing attitudes toward exotic cultures.<sup>108</sup> In Locke's view, Bizet's static harmonies were not intended to portray gypsy culture (or Spanish culture) as primitive and backward; rather, according to Locke, Bizet's static harmonies constitute an attempt—a respectful and non-racist attempt, Locke insists—to imitate certain features of genuine Spanish music.

But I would argue that Bizet's musical language in *Carmen* is deeply indebted, not to actual Spanish music, but to an already-established French Orientalist code. As I have argued above, many of the features found in *Carmen* resonate strongly with the exotic numbers that we have examined in David and Berlioz. These striking parallels between Bizet and his French predecessors suggest that Bizet was drawing on French markers of exoticism. To be sure, Bizet did consult some Spanish songs when composing *Carmen*, and he incorporated certain features from those songs into his musical style. But the language that shapes *Carmen* is derived, not from Spanish sources, but from other French operas—

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<sup>108</sup> Ralph Locke, "Spanish Local Color in Bizet's *Carmen*," *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer, Paris, 1830-1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 344-345.

including some of Bizet's own earlier operas, which use a remarkably similar set of markers, as we have seen above.

In sum: the exotic numbers in *Carmen* are marked by static harmonies, modal inflections, and descending chromatic lines, and thus are strongly tied to a French tradition in which these, and other, signifiers became part of an exotic vocabulary. Many of the numbers in *Carmen* are marked by a strong sense of physicality, for *Carmen* features several exotic dance numbers that evoke the sexualized body in motion. The association of exoticism with dance, and with sexuality, is one that we shall encounter again and again; it, too, is part of the French tradition of exoticism.

### ***Saint-Saëns: Exoticist Extraordinaire***

Saint-Saëns' life spanned almost the entire exotic tradition; he was born in 1835, shortly before exoticism exploded onto the French scene with Félicien David's *Désert*. He died in 1921, several years after Debussy's death, at a time when exoticism had nearly run its course in French musical culture.<sup>109</sup> During the course of his long life, he composed a wide array of exotic works, including *Mélodies Persanes* (1870-71), *La Princesse Jaune* (1872), *Samson et Dalila* (1877), *Suite Algérienne* (1880), *Africa* (1891), Piano Concerto no. 5 ("Egyptian") (1896), *Trois Tableaux Symphoniques d'après "La Foi"* (1908), among many others. Saint-Saëns was widely acclaimed as a brilliant practitioner of exoticism; Raoul Laparra, for instance, asserted in 1922 that "Saint-Saëns m'apparaît comme le plus grande

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<sup>109</sup> Ralph Locke observes that, in the 1920s and 30s, Western composers lost interest in exoticism in favor of radical modernist experimentation. Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers," 134-135.



orientaliste musical qui ait jamais existe.”<sup>110</sup> Saint-Saëns was also acclaimed as the most French of all musicians, perhaps in part because of his avid participation in the French tradition of exoticism. In an obituary for Saint-Saëns, Jean Chantavoire writes, “La musique française, comme interprète de l’esprit français, a peut-être eu des penseurs plus profonds ou plus originaux que Saint-Saëns: elle n’a jamais eu de plus grand écrivain.”<sup>111</sup> Chantavoire’s assertion illustrates a widely held view: Saint-Saëns was viewed by many as the embodiment of musical Frenchness.

I believe that Saint-Saëns’ heavy use of exoticism had a profound influence on Debussy. This claim may sound bizarre, for Debussy and Saint-Saëns were adversaries; Debussy viewed much of Saint-Saëns’ music as unoriginal and academic, and Saint-Saëns considered Debussy’s music to be nonsensical, excessively bizarre, and formless. Music history is rife with battles between traditionalists and innovators—such as Monteverdi vs. Artusi, and Brahms and Hanslick vs. Wagner and Liszt—and the animosity between Debussy and Saint-Saëns is yet another instance of this familiar battle. Debussy wrote that Saint-Saëns “is, by definition, the essential traditional musician. He has accepted tradition’s harsh discipline, and he never allows himself to overstep the limits set by those he considers to be the great masters.”<sup>112</sup> Saint-Saëns retaliated by writing, “Debussy did not create a style. On the contrary, he cultivated the absence of style and of

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<sup>110</sup> “Saint-Saëns appears to me to be the greatest musical orientalist that ever existed.” Raoul Laparra, “Saint-Saëns et l’Orientalisme Espagnol,” *Le Ménestrel* 84:1 (Vendredi 6 Janvier 1922): 4.

<sup>111</sup> “French music, as an interpretation of the French spirit, has perhaps had more profound or more original thinkers than Saint-Saëns: it has never had a greater writer.” Jean Chantavoire, “Sur Saint-Saëns,” *Le Ménestrel* 84:2 (Vendredi 13 Janvier 1922): 11.

<sup>112</sup> *Debussy on Music*, 142.

logic and common sense.”<sup>113</sup> As we can see from these quotes, a great deal of mutual animosity seethed between Debussy and Saint-Saëns.

Why, then, do I cite Saint-Saëns’ works throughout this dissertation as examples of the exotic tradition that influenced Debussy? I believe that, despite Debussy’s dislike of Saint-Saëns, the latter’s music serves as a useful example of French musical exoticism—useful in part because it *is* so traditional, and hence embodies and exemplifies the French exotic tradition (among other musical traditions). That is, Saint-Saëns’ adherence to tradition renders him the ideal synecdoche—the more closely someone follows a given tradition, the more clearly his works illustrate that tradition. Therefore, even though Debussy looked upon Saint-Saëns’ traditionalism with disdain, I argue that it is this very traditionalism that makes Saint-Saëns such a useful source of musical examples

#### *Pentatonicism in La Princesse Jaune*

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that pentatonicism has many connotations: depending on the context, it connotes the exotic, the pastoral, and the dreamlike. In this section, we shall discover that Saint-Saëns’ one-act comic opera, *La Princesse Jaune*, draws on all these potential connotations of pentatonicism. Thus, in this seemingly unassuming one-act opera, pentatonicism performs important semiotic work. *La Princesse Jaune* has not received any scholarly attention, but I believe that this work is worthy of analysis, not least because of its richly symbolic use of pentatonicism.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 147.

Set in the Netherlands, this opera features a young Dutch man, Kornelis, who has fallen in love with a portrait of a Japanese woman. He has never actually met this woman, but he nevertheless falls in love with her image—a poignant testimony, perhaps, to the essentially imaginary quality of exoticism (an idea that I will develop in greater detail below). Underscoring the relationship between exoticism and fantasy, *La Princesse Jaune* contains an intriguing dream sequence, in which Kornelis (under the influence of opium) falls asleep and dreams that he is in Japan, united at last with the lady in the portrait. The protagonist's use of opium may perhaps be indebted to Berlioz' well-known *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830), in which a lovestruck artist overdoses on opium and has a series of hallucinatory dreams about his unattainable beloved. But the reference to opium in the Saint-Saëns opera may also reflect the aura of exoticism and forbidden sexuality that still surrounded this drug in the 1870's.

In any case, the opium-induced dream scene in *La Princesse Jaune* draws heavily on pentatonic scales. At the very beginning of the dream sequence (scene 5), Kornelius sings “Ah! What golden cloud opens before my eyes?” This “golden cloud” is Japan; in order to underscore the exoticism of Kornelius' vision, the orchestra presents a pentatonic melody (ex. 13, mm. 1-9). In other words, at the very moment when the dreaming Kornelius finds himself in Japan, the music becomes pentatonic.

Later, in the same dream scene, immediately after Kornelius has sung “dream of Paradise, I have passed through the gate,” another fully pentatonic section begins, based exclusively on a G pentatonic scale (G-A-B-D-E) and lasting for 25

Moderato

PIANO.

KORNELIS

*cresc.*

*f*

Ped.

*p*

Ah! quel mu-a-ge

d'or s'ou - vre de - vant mes yeux?

Example 13. Camille Saint-Saëns, *La Princesse Jaune* (1872), mm. 1-9

measures (ex. 14, mm. 70-105). The harmonies in this section are remarkably static: I and vi are the only chords found in this 25-measure passage. Indeed, I and vi are the only two complete triads available within the pentatonic scale; containing only five notes, the pentatonic scale allows for little in the way of harmonic (and melodic) variety. In fact, this passage could even be heard as consisting of a single tonic triad, decorated with its upper neighbor on the “vi” chords. What we see here, then, is how neatly two exotic techniques dovetail with each other: pentatonicism

Du pa-ra - dis rè - vé,

J'ai donc fran-chi la por - - - - - te

Ped.

cresc.

All.  
f p giocoso

Example 14. Camille Saint-Saëns, *La Princesse Jaune* (1872), mm. 70-85

Je te sa - lue, o, pa -  
 -ys Ja-po - nais, C'est la ré\_a-li - té! Par la fenêtre ou -  
 -ver - te voi - ci la fou - le des mar - chands,  
 Voi - ci les pa - go - des les champs, Les mai -

Example 14 (continued). Camille Saint-Saëns, *La Princesse Jaune* (1872), mm. 86-105

and stasis. Pentatonicism, an exotic marker, yields a static harmonic palette, itself another exotic marker. Pentatonicism is hence an ideal vehicle for creating a non-goal-oriented, exotic sound.

Saint-Saëns fully exploits this vehicle, exploiting the static quality of pentatonicism to create a directionless oscillation between two closely related chords. The voice-leading throughout this section is designed to highlight the static nature of the harmonies. The common tones shared by both I and vi—G and B in this case—are repeated throughout in the same register. The G-B dyad hence assumes a drone-like character, sometimes followed by D, sometimes E, depending on which chord is being used. The first measure of this section, for instance, alternates between the G-B dyad and the note D, creating a broken G Major triad. The second measure alternates between the G-B dyad and the note E, forming an E minor triad. Indeed, all of the vi chords in this section are in first inversion, which minimizes harmonic variety and plays up the similarity between the I and the vi chords.

This section brings together several symbolic meanings of pentatonicism: its association with dreaming is being invoked here, since this pentatonic section occurs during a dream scene. Its association with exoticism is also, of course, reinforced by this scene, which is set in Japan. The scene even alludes to the widespread association of pentatonicism with innocence: Asian women, particularly Chinese and Japanese women, were often associated with childlike fragility and naiveté. Madame Butterfly is only the most famous of a string of Asian “femmes fragiles” in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century opera. As Day-O’Connell observes, “The *japonaiserie*

and the *chinoiserie* in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, with their childlike heroines named ‘Butterfly’ and ‘Iris’ often employed an aesthetic congruent with the pastoral.”<sup>114</sup> Saint-Saëns’ use of pentatonicism in connection with a Japanese woman resonates with the stereotype of the childlike, innocent Asian woman.

Significantly, the Japanese woman of Kornelius’ dreams, Ming, never actually appears in the opera. She therefore exists only as a (pentatonic) figment of his imagination, embodying the image of the silent, passive Asian woman, who exists only to cater to male fantasies. In short, she is pure fantasy. In *La Princesse Jaune*, then, the Asian character is presented as imaginary. Is Saint-Saëns pointing out that the image of the submissive Asian doll is a male fantasy, dreamed up (in Kornelius’ case, literally) by lustful Western men, lacking a basis in reality?

If indeed this is one of the messages of the opera, then Saint-Saëns’ prominent use of pentatonicism serves to reinforce this idea: by linking pentatonicism, dreams, and exoticism, Saint-Saëns calls our attention to the fact that pentatonicism, as a signifier, has multiple signifieds. In some musical works, pentatonicism signifies that a character is dreaming. In other works, pentatonicism is a musical marker of exoticism. It can signify either of these two topics, depending on the musical and dramatic contexts in which it appears. But in Saint-Saëns’ dream scene, as we have seen, pentatonicism signifies *both* of these topics. By explicitly linking these two themes—dreaming and exoticism—to each other, and using pentatonicism (a signifier of both) to reinforce the link, Saint-Saëns in a way anticipates an argument

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<sup>114</sup> Day-O’Connell, *Pentatonicism*, 98.



often made by contemporary scholars: the “Orient” is a Western invention, an imaginary land dreamed up by the West.

Many scholars argue that exotic peoples are a figment of the Western imagination, a screen upon which Western fantasies are projected. Susan McClary, for example, writes: “The ‘Orient’ thus became a kind of utopian projection, a place offering in unchecked profusion those qualities the West had traditionally denied itself through Christian prohibition, political oppression or regimented bourgeois mores. Repressed desires and grievances emerged and found an outlet for expression, however displaced, in Orientalism.”<sup>115</sup> The view of Orientalism as a Western fantasy is indebted to Edward Said’s groundbreaking work *Orientalism*; through his analysis of Flaubert’s Orientalist novels, he makes several important arguments about the relationship between Orientalism, sexuality, and fantasy. Said writes, “In all of his novels Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy. Emma Bovary and Frédéric Moreau pine for what in their drab (or harried) bourgeois lives they do not have, and what they realize they want comes easily to their daydreams packed inside Oriental clichés: harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherbets, ointments, and so on.”<sup>116</sup> Said’s reference to Oriental princesses is especially relevant here, because, as we have seen, the object of Kornelius’ sexual fantasies is a Japanese princess. Thus, *La Princesse Jaune* plays into a common Western fantasy—the fantasy of a submissive

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<sup>115</sup> McClary, *Carmen*, 31.

<sup>116</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 190.

Asian princess. But, by making the Asian princess a figment of the protagonists' imagination, the opera reveals the essentially fictive nature of exoticism.

*East vs. West in Samson et Dalila*

Despite its biblical subject matter, Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* is, I would argue, an exotic opera. Ralph Locke persuasively argues that "the Orientalist point of view...saturates the work [*Samson et Dalila*] through an essentially binary construction: Samson, the proto-European, is male and favored by God; Delilah, chief representative of the East, is female and seeks his downfall and that of the God-chosen West. For the most part, Samson and his people are presented as the dramatic 'subject,' the collective Self of this story, whose point of view the audience is primarily led to adopt."<sup>117</sup> Like many exotic operas, *Samson et Dalila* was enormously popular in France. As Stephen Huebner points out, *Samson et Dalila* received its French premiere in 1890, to great acclaim: "The work then swept the provinces and upon his accession to the Opera directorship Eugene Bertrand announced a production of *Samson* as a priority. It was finally given there on 23 November 1892 and became the most frequently performed French opera at that house after *Faust*. In this single respect did Saint-Saëns come to outdo his distrusted rival Massenet in popularity as an opera composer."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ralph P. Locke, "Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*," in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 3:3 (Nov. 1991): 271.

<sup>118</sup> Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siecle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 212.

Many sections of *Samson et Dalila* contain exotic signifiers, but, as Locke observes “The most obviously exotic numbers in the opera are the two ballets.”<sup>119</sup> It is to one of these two ballets, “Dance of the Priestesses of Dagon,” that we will turn, examining Saint-Saëns’ use of exotic features. Throughout much of this dance, Saint-Saëns creates modal inflections through his recurrent use of F-sharp, rather than F-natural, as the sixth scale degree. The modal color of the piece is further enhanced by Saint-Saëns’ use of the lowered seventh scale degree.

Indeed, Locke notes that “the ‘Dance of the Priestesses of Dagon’ (Act 1) gives the fullest glimpse of the Philistine maidens...part of the demure yet intriguing effect comes from the elusive modal language of the music: the opening phrase uses a minor third degree but a major sixth, in addition to a lowered seventh, that single most distinctive sign of temporal or geographical displacement in Western music of recent centuries.”<sup>120</sup>

Despite such modal inflections, however, some aspects of this piece are primarily tonal, not modal. That is, it behaves in some respects like a tonal composition: its musical syntax is based largely on tonic-dominant relations, and its voice-leading is conventionally tonal. For example, mm. 4-5 present a V/v-v progression, in which the leading tone to the dominant—the D# on the last beat of m. 4—is resolved in the conventional manner, by ascending half step to the E on the first beat of m. 5 (ex. 15). As further evidence of conventional tonal syntax, the second phrase transposes the opening musical material to the dominant; such

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<sup>119</sup> Locke, “Constructing the Oriental ‘Other,’” 266.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

The young girls, accompanying Delilah, dance, waving garlands of flowers, which they hold in their hands and seem to entice the Hebrew warriors who are with Samson. Samson anxiously tries, but in vain, to avoid Delilah's glances. His eyes, in spite of him, follow all the enchantress's movements, as she takes part in the voluptuous poses and gestures of the young Philistine maidens.

### Dance of the Priestesses of Dagon

Allegretto. (104 = ♩)

*sempre pianissimo*

*leggieramente*

Example 15. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Dalila* (1875), mm. 1-12

transposition accords a prominent structural role to the dominant, a role that conforms to standard tonal practice. Thus, “Dance of the Priestesses of Dagon” illustrates Saint-Saëns’ use of modal inflections as a colorful exotic marker operating primarily on a surface level.

But the modal inflections in this piece do not remain *entirely* on the surface; they do exert some influence on voice-leading and long-range harmonic structure. A sign of this influence is the paucity of authentic cadences on the tonic. To be sure, the piece is replete with cadences, but most of these are on the dominant, not the tonic. Indeed, the first authentic cadence on A does not occur until mm. 27-28 (ex. 16). The scarcity of authentic cadences in the piece stems from Saint-Saëns’ avoidance of the leading tone—in other words, he uses the raised seventh scale degree sparingly, and favors the modal-sounding subtonic instead.

The second of the two ballets in *Samson et Dalila*, the “Bacchanale,” is even more overtly exotic. This work begins with an oboe solo, offering yet another example of the use of the oboe for exotic effect (something that we have already encountered in several exotic works, including *Le Désert*). The oboe solo is heavily laced with augmented seconds, intensifying the Oriental color of the music. Immediately following the introductory oboe solo, the music launches into a modal dance, with a strong Phrygian color (due to Saint-Saëns’ use of E-flat within a D minor context).

A particularly interesting feature of this Bacchanale involves the interplay between stasis and musical frenzy. A highly popular piece, the Bacchanale is often



Example 16. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Dalila* (1875), mm. 21-30

performed as an independent work, extracted from its original context.<sup>121</sup> But this context is crucial if we are to understand the meaning of the Bacchanale: when seen in the context of the entire opera, it becomes clear that this Bacchanale is a savage victory dance. In the previous act, a group of Philistines (led by Delilah) have just succeeded in capturing and blinding Samson. During the Bacchanale, the

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.,” 267-68.

Philistines are engaging in wild, drunken revelry, celebrating their recent triumph over Samson. The Bacchanale is thus a triumphant celebration of pagan brutality, almost prefiguring Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* in its depiction of raw, elemental frenzy.

But I would argue that the debauchery of the Philistines is framed and contained through ostinato figures, which curb the diabolical outbursts of the exotic characters. For example, the first section of the Bacchanale, which could hardly be described as static, exudes ferocious energy; the melody, as if possessed, builds emphatically, inexorably, to a climax in m. 37 (ex. 17, mm. 32-54). But at this very moment, when the primitive energies of the melody are reaching a boiling point, the melody abruptly cadences on the tonic and breaks off. A muffled ostinato enters in m. 38, ushering in a calmer, quieter passage, as if to counter the explosive energy of the preceding section.

But it is not long before the revelers' savage mania builds up again: the ostinato stops in m. 56, leading to yet another diabolical eruption of frenzy. This section builds to a climax. Beginning in m. 92, the breathless fragmentation of the melody, combined with the increasingly faster note values, ratchets the energy level higher and higher (ex. 18, mm. 90-113). But the music suddenly loses steam. In mm. 104-106, the triplet-runs begin to sound languid rather than frenetic. In m. 107 the pulsating harmonies give way to a rhythmically irregular ostinato figure, in groups of 3 plus five eighth notes. This ostinato figure is remarkably persistent, lasting for a staggering 42 measures, continuing until m. 148. Once again, the frenzied excess of the revelers is reined in, curbed, contained.

The image displays five systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment, likely for the opera *Samson et Delila* by Camille Saint-Saëns. The notation is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 'cresc.' marking. The second system features a piano introduction with a 'p' marking and a 'f' marking. The third system shows a piano introduction with a 'p' marking. The fourth system shows a piano introduction with a 'cresc.' marking. The fifth system shows a piano introduction with a 'p' marking.

Example 17. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Delila* (1877), mm. 32-54



8-measure phrase in the right hand, marked *sf* (sforzando).

Diminuendo (*dim.*) in the right hand.

Piano (*p*) and *legg.* (leggiero) in the right hand.

*malinconico* (melancholic) in the right hand, marked *p* (piano).

Example 18. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Delila* (1877), mm. 90-113

Ralph Locke notes that “in this ballet [the Bacchanale], the Philistine princes and maidens prolong their debauched revels beyond daybreak, urged on by hypnotic rhythms in the castanets, timpani, and low strings.”<sup>122</sup> But I am skeptical of Locke’s claim. How could hypnotic rhythms act as a stimulus to debauched revelry? Wouldn’t the hypnotic regularity of the ostinato put a damper on this revelry? In my opinion, that is exactly what occurs; the ostinato acts as a constraining, not an enabling, force upon the Philistines’ debauched revelry.

### *Saint-Saëns’ Piano Concerto No. 5*

Our next example of Saint-Saëns’ exotic works is drawn from the second movement of Saint-Saëns’ *Piano Concerto No. 5* (1896). A piano concerto may seem to be an unlikely locus for musical exoticism, for exoticism is most often found in opera, in which the exotic context can be made explicit through plot, costumes, and staging. But Saint-Saëns creates a strikingly vivid portrait of exoticism in the ostensibly abstract, “absolute” genre of the piano concerto. Nicknamed the *Egyptian Concerto*, the second movement of Saint-Saëns’ 5<sup>th</sup> piano concerto is a musical postcard of sorts, recording his impressions of Egypt.

As we examine this work, it will be helpful to keep in mind that Ralph Locke has identified two prevalent—and contrasting—stereotypes about exotic peoples. The first of these stereotypes portrays the Orient as a violent, barbaric land. But the second stereotype portrays the opposite view: the Orient as a pastoral oasis, a

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 266.

blissful escape from the stressful urban lifestyle associated with the West.<sup>123</sup> Locke does not identify specific musical markers associated with these contrasting stereotypes, but Day-O’Connell suggests that pentatonicism may be linked with the pastoral stereotype, and chromaticism may signify the violent stereotype. Day-O’Connell writes, “The musical duality of pentatonicism versus chromaticism correlates with the exoticist duality identified by Ralph P. Locke as ‘sentimental-pastoral’ versus ‘diabolical and threatening.’”<sup>124</sup> Although Day-O’Connell does not discuss Saint-Saëns’ *Egyptian Concerto*, we will see that the interplay between pentatonicism and chromaticism in this work lends support to his observation.

The second movement of the Egyptian concerto begins with a nod toward the violent stereotype of the Orient. It opens with insistently repeated chords, played fortissimo. The effect is one of brutal hammering, not pastoral bliss (ex. 19, mm. 1-17). The dominant pedal and the syncopated rhythms contribute to this effect. In m. 5 the piano enters with a virtuosic scalar run; the prominent augmented seconds, drawn from the D harmonic minor scale, lend an oriental (and chromatic) flavor to this virtuosic opening gesture. In mm. 6-8, the piano plays a series of frenetically repeated notes, which grow gradually faster in a written-out accelerando. The increasingly frantic repeated notes lead to a breathless outburst of rapid passagework (mm. 9-17), accompanied by incessantly throbbing chords in the orchestra.

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<sup>123</sup> Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers,” 107.

<sup>124</sup> Day-O’Connell, *Pentatonicism*, 92.

## II

**Andante**

**1<sup>er</sup> Piano**

**2<sup>d</sup> Piano**

**ff**

**8**

**ff**

**8**

**sempre, f**

**ff**

Example 19. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Piano Concerto No. 5*, Mvt. II (1896), mm. 1-9

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with two staves (treble and bass clef). The first system shows a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The second system continues this pattern, with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) appearing. The third system features a crescendo marking (*cresc.*) and a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The fourth system concludes the passage with a final dynamic marking of *f*.

Example 19 (continued). Camille Saint-Saëns, *Piano Concerto No. 5*, Mvt. II (1896), mm. 10-17

These 17 measures are replete with augmented seconds and other chromatic inflections; indeed, in mm. 13-16, the orchestra plays a descending chromatic line with syncopated rhythms. As we have seen in other examples, descending chromatic lines are a musical marker of exoticism. Saint-Saëns' use of chromatic lines underscores the exoticism of this movement. In mm. 1-17, the numerous chromatic inflections, along with the improvisatory character of the music, combine to create an effect that resonates with the stereotype of the Orient as a land of unbridled, even demonic, energy. Indeed, this section evokes a sense of improvisatory freedom bordering on anarchy, for the capricious energy of this section borders on manic frenzy.

Several sections of the movement, however, resonate with the other stereotype of the Orient: the image of the Orient as tranquil and idyllic. At measure 63, the performance direction reads "*allegretto tranquillo, quasi andante*." The music does indeed slip into a tranquil oasis at this point. Here, a rippling ostinato figure floats above a murmuring melody (ex. 20, mm. 63-77). Saint-Saëns heard this melody during a boat trip on the Nile.

If this section evokes a languid, trancelike vision of pastoral bliss, then the "*poco piu mosso*" section from mm. 181-220 paints a more frankly cheerful portrait of pastoral exoticism (ex. 21, mm. 181-195). Saint-Saëns wrote that he intended this section to represent the croaking of frogs and the chirping of crickets at night in Egypt. In other words, he intended this section as a pastoral evocation of an exotic landscape. Several musical features contribute to the bucolic character of this

All<sup>to</sup> tranquillo, quasi and<sup>to</sup>

*p*

All<sup>to</sup> tranquillo

*ppp*

*mf*

*dim.*

*pp*

Example 20. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Piano Concerto No. 5*, Mvt. II (1896), mm. 63-77

section. The right hand continuously repeats the pitch C#, each time preceded by a grace note on D#. The static repetition of C# enhances the exotic, pastoral effect, while the grace notes and the sprightly tempo lend a bubbly, cheerful character to the music. It is likely that the grace notes evoke the chirping sounds of crickets mentioned above.

Poco più mosso

pp

8-----

Poco più mosso

ppp

pp

(la main droite toujours pp)

8-----

p cantabile

8-----

p

cresc.

sempre ppp

Example 21. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Piano Concerto No. 5*, Mvt. II (1896), mm. 181-195



In contrast to the impassioned virtuosity of some of the earlier sections, this section is remarkably easy to play. Indeed, it is almost childlike in its technical (and musical) simplicity. This technical simplicity contributes to the prevailing mood of pastoral bliss: life is good, easy, and trouble-free in this exotic idyll. Even the notes are easy to play. Here, Saint-Saëns is using pentatonicism to signify a pastoral, exotic mood, for this section of the concerto is entirely pentatonic; indeed, it is based on the most iconic pentatonic scale, consisting of the black keys on the piano. That is, this section uses only the five pitches F#, C#, G#, D#, and A#. Given the association of pentatonicism with pastoral exoticism, it is no wonder that Saint-Saëns' evocation of an exotic landscape is drenched in pentatonicism.

### ***Delibes: Lakmé, Performativity, and Exoticism***

Leo Delibes' exotic opera *Lakmé* (1883) offers a fascinating case study in musical exoticism, for it engages with issues of gender, performance, and religion in complex and meaningful ways. The plot revolves around a doomed interracial relationship between Lakmé and Gerald. Gerald is a British soldier stationed in India to prevent native uprisings and to ensure Indian cooperation with British imperial rule. Lakmé, a young Indian priestess, belongs to a group of rebels who are fighting for independence from British rule. Gerald and Lakmé are thus on opposite sides: Gerald is fighting to maintain colonial power over India, whereas Lakmé is fighting to free India from colonial domination. Despite their opposing political affiliations, Gerald and Lakmé fall in love—a relationship that is doomed from the start due to insurmountable cultural, political, and racial differences.

Inevitably, their relationship ends tragically, with Lakmé committing suicide and Gerald returning to the British army to continue his fight against Indian revolts.

Delibes highlights the racial tension inherent in the plot through the masterful ways in which he deploys and combines exotic markers. From the very beginning of the opera, Lakmé and her people are marked as thoroughly Other to European culture, through Delibes' use of exotic signifiers. Early in Act I, Lakmé, along with a choir of Hindus, sings an exotic hymn to the Hindu God, Ganesha (ex. 22). The hymn is saturated with exotic markers, signaling the "otherness" and perceived strangeness of Lakmé's religion and culture. The melody and harmony are based on an exotic-sounding mode: B-flat minor with raised fourth and sixth scale degrees. This scale contains an augmented second (between the third and fourth scale degrees), and Delibes exploits this interval for exotic effect in Lakmé's vocal line. The melismatic vocal melody, accompanied by static harmonies, contributes to the exotic effect.

The orchestration further enhances the Oriental color. In his discussion of *Lakmé*, Richard Langham Smith points out that "the accompaniment illustrates the increasing use of the harp as a vehicle for exotic atmosphere."<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Parakilas observes that "Lakmé, singing in her capacity as priestess, has music using all the exotic means that are absent from her scenes with Gerald: a non-

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<sup>125</sup> Richard Langham Smith, *French Music Since Berlioz* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 34.

Western scale, melismatic melody, static harmony, and an accompaniment that includes harp and humming chorus.”<sup>126</sup>

The image displays a musical score for two systems of music. Each system includes four vocal staves (L, S, T, B) and a piano accompaniment. The first system's lyrics are "Pa - le Si - va! Puissant Ga - ne -". The second system's lyrics are "- sa! Ô vous, que cré - a Brah -". The piano accompaniment features a harp-like texture with sustained chords and a humming chorus indicated by "Ped." and "☆". The second system also includes the instruction "(à bouche fermée)" for the bass voice part.

Example 22. Leo Delibes, *Lakme*, Blanche Dourga (1881-82)

<sup>126</sup> James Parakilas, "The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter, Part I," *Opera Quarterly* 10:2 (1993): 50.

Parakilas' observation raises an important point: Lakmé does not sing in an exotic style when she is alone with Gerald. Her love duets with Gerald employ a thoroughly European musical language, in contrast to the perfumed exoticism of her Hindu prayer. Parakilas offers a persuasive explanation for this phenomenon, arguing that in *Lakmé* "personal relationships across racial lines are given the 'universal' color of unexotic music," whereas "exotic music is used to represent the realm in which the hostility of the races is played out; it is heard in all the public scenes."<sup>127</sup> That is, *Lakmé* links exoticism to the public sphere, reserving European-style music for the intimate private sphere. The association of exotic music with the public sphere is particularly pronounced in Lakmé's famous virtuoso aria, "Où va la jeune hindou," (popularly known as the Bell Song), in which Lakmé publicly performs a highly exotic—and highly theatrical—musical number. This public performance is orchestrated by her father. Parakilas explains that "Lakmé's father, Nilakantha, knowing that an Englishman has violated the sanctity of the temple grounds and dared to love his daughter, makes her sing the Bell Song at the bazaar in order to draw a crowd in which he hopes to identify the guilty Englishman so that he can have him punished."<sup>128</sup> Nilakantha sings angrily, "If this villain has penetrated my domain, if he has defied death to come near you...it is because he loves you, my Lakmé, you!...He's passing in triumph through the town, so let us gather this wandering crowd and, if he sees you, Lakmé, I shall read it in his eyes! Now steady your voice! Smile as you sing! Sing, Lakmé! Sing!

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<sup>127</sup> Parakilas, "The Soldier and the Exotic," 48.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 50.

Vengeance is near!”<sup>129</sup> The patriarchy—in the figure of Lakmé’s authoritarian father—thus forces Lakmé to perform. And the song that she performs puts her femininity, and her exoticism, on display for the male gaze.

Her song begins with a lengthy vocalization on the syllable “ah.” (ex. 23) Wordless singing is a marker of femininity and exoticism. Mladen Dolar observes that “the voice beyond sense is self-evidently equated with femininity, whereas the text, the instance of signification, is in this simple paradigmatic opposition on the side of masculinity.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, by performing wordless vocals, Lakmé is performing her feminine gender, putting herself on display as a gendered subject. But she is also putting herself on display as a racialized, exoticized subject, for wordless vocals signify not only femininity, but also exoticism. Derek Scott observes that the wordless vocalise is “a device that became common in representations of the ‘emotional’ Easterner, the lack of verbal content pointing to a contrast with the ‘rational’ Westerner.”<sup>131</sup> In fact, we have already encountered wordless singing in two of the previous exotic operas examined in this chapter: the “Danse des Esclaves” in Berlioz’s *Les Troyens*, in which the slave girls vocalize on “ha” throughout much of the song, and the “Song and Melodrama” from *Carmen* in which Carmen impudently replies with “tra-la-la” when interrogated by the policeman Zuniga about her crimes. In both of these songs, wordless singing represents the sensuality and irrationality of the feminine, exotic subject. But in

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<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 70.

<sup>131</sup> Derek Scott, *From the Erotic to the Demonic: On Critical Musicology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 157.

Nº 10.

SCÈNE ET LÉGENDE  
DE LA FILLE DU PARIA.

(Sans mesure)

**LAKMÉ.** *mf* Ah! *p*

**NILAKANTHA.**

(Les Hindous se rapprochent peu à peu :

**SOPRANOS.**

**TÉNORS.**

**BASSES.**

**PIANO.** *p*

*Lent.* *mf* *p* *f* *p* *tr* *long.*

VARIANTE. ★ *long.*

*long.*

Example 23. Leo Delibes, *Lakme*, Scene et Legende (1881-82)

Lakmé's Bell Song, its meaning is more complicated, for Lakmé's sensual vocalizations are presented as a performance, as part of a fake persona that she is donning in order to entrap Gerald: it is not presented as an expression of her genuine inner self.

The Bell Song becomes even more highly performative and theatrical in its final section. Here, Lakmé erupts into wordless virtuosic coloratura, emitting an almost hysterical stream of incoherent notes. Her vocalizations are underpinned by a drone bass that marks Lakmé as a primitive Oriental, incapable of communicating coherently.

### ***Massenet: Slumbering in the Heart of Every Frenchman***

Debussy and his contemporaries recognized the importance of Massenet as a formative influence on early 20<sup>th</sup>-century French music. Indeed, the French writer Romain Rolland (1866-1944) argued that there was a "Massenet slumbering in the heart of every Frenchman."<sup>132</sup> Composer Francis Poulenc similarly noted the "Massenet aspect of many pages of Debussy."<sup>133</sup> Saint-Saëns, in his memoir *Musical Memories*, wrote, "The fact remains that Massenet is one of the most brilliant diamonds in our musical crown. No musician has enjoyed so much favor

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<sup>132</sup> Romain Rolland, *Jean-Christophe in Paris*, trans. Gilbert Cannan (New York: Henry Holt and Company: 1911), 60.

<sup>133</sup> Francis Poulenc, "Tradition," in *Composers on Music: Eight Centuries of Writings*, ed. Josiah Fisk (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 341.

with the public save Auber.”<sup>134</sup> In fact, Debussy himself wrote, in 1901, that Massenet’s “influence on contemporary music is clear enough, although it is not acknowledged by some who owe him a great deal—ungrateful hypocrites!”<sup>135</sup> In 1912, in an obituary that Debussy wrote for Massenet, he wrote, “Massenet was the most genuinely loved of all our contemporary musicians. It was, moreover, this love which we had for him that enabled him to retain his unique position in the world of music.”<sup>136</sup>

Massenet’s opera *Hérodiade* (1881) puts on display the appealingly exotic music that made Massenet so popular. The first number (48 measures) in Act II, Scene V, of this work depicts exotic female slaves—from Nubia, Greece, and Babylon—performing sensual dance movements in their master’s bedroom. Lowered seventh scale degrees—and at times raised sixth degrees—impart a modal flavor to the languid dance of the slaves (ex. 24). In his brief discussion of this number, Ralph Locke observes that it features “a fascinatingly shifting modality (both the sixth degree above the tonic and the seventh degree directly above it can be either flat or natural).”<sup>137</sup> In other words, this piece is fluid in its treatment of modality. Although modal inflections are present from the beginning, they become especially pronounced at m. 13. Here, the lowered seventh scale degree appears as

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<sup>134</sup> Camille Saint-Saëns, *Musical Memories*, trans. Edwin Gile Rich (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co, 1919), 133.

<sup>135</sup> Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, trans. Richard Langham Smith (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977) 34.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>137</sup> Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers,” 42.



# ACTE II

1<sup>er</sup> TABLEAU.

1<sup>er</sup> TABLEAU.

## Scène V

LA CHAMBRE D'HÉRODE.

*C'est l'heure de la sieste. — Jour tamisé par les tentures.*

*HÉRODE est étendu sur un lit d'ivoire. — Des ESCLAVES sont accroupies au fond de la chambre.*

**Andantino maestoso. 96 = ♩**

HÉRODE.

UNE JEUNE  
BABYLONIENNE.

ESCLAVES.

**Andantino maestoso.**

**PIANO.**

**sf**

*dim.*

**RIDEAU.**

**p** avec tranquillité, également, sans nuances.

**mf**

Example 24. Jules Massenet, *Hérodiade* (1881), mm. 1-13



Example 24 (continued). Jules Massenet, *Hérodiade* (1881), mm. 14-17

part of a minor dominant harmony. This piece also makes a liberal use of Dorian (i.e. raised) sixths, particularly in the septuplet arabesques in m. 16, 33, and 47.

Despite its fluid approach to modality, the piece is tonally static—another hallmark of French exotic music. The pitch-class G is the tonic (or tonal center) throughout and the harmonies are extremely repetitive. The orchestration further intensifies the Oriental color of the music; the wind instruments, especially the oboe, take on prominent melodic roles, a typical feature of many French exotic works.

### *Massenet's Thaïs: The Erotic Exotic*

In many of the exotic operas that we have examined, the “Orient” serves as a site upon which erotic fantasies are projected; indeed, an Oriental setting in opera

often serves as an excuse for frank sensuality that, in a non-exotic opera, would perhaps have been viewed as unacceptable. Annegret Fauser observes that “In opera, exotic moments contained in the plot could provide the justification for...musical representation of sexual excess.”<sup>138</sup> We have already observed the link between exoticism and sexual excess in several operas, especially in *Carmen*, but also in the numerous “Almée dances” that we have encountered, in Félicien David, Berlioz, and Bizet. Massenet’s *Thaïs* is firmly located in this tradition of sexualizing the Orient; it plays heavily on the eroticisation of the exotic.

The plot of *Thaïs*, which is based on an 1890 novel by Anatole France, revolves around sexual excess. Thaïs is an Egyptian courtesan who lives a life of hedonistic excess—until she meets the monk Athanaël, who persuades her to convert to Christianity and renounce her sinful life of the flesh. Shortly after Thaïs converts to Christianity and joins a convent, an unexpected plot twist takes place: Athanaël begins to feel strong sexual desire for Thaïs; he finds himself obsessively fantasizing about the former courtesan. The irony is palpable: no sooner does Athanaël succeed in freeing Thaïs from her sinful life than he himself falls prey to sinful thoughts. Thaïs and Athanaël never actually sleep together, but Athanaël has many vivid fantasies of sex with Thaïs and is tormented by his lust for her.

The opera ends with Thaïs’ death and subsequent ascent to Heaven—and it is strongly implied that Athanaël descends to Hell as punishment for his lustful desires. Thus, the plot is structured around the age-old oppositions of good vs. evil

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<sup>138</sup> Fauser, *Musical Encounters*, 140.

and purity vs. lust. Thaïs is transformed from a lustful sinner into a chaste nun, whereas Athanaël is transformed from a chaste monk into a lustful sinner.

Massenet enacts the multiple ironies in the plot through the ways in which he deploys and withholds exotic music. Thaïs' conversion is beautifully portrayed in a nonvocal—but highly lyrical—number entitled “Meditation,” for solo violin with orchestra. This number contains no hint of exoticism; it employs a thoroughly European musical style, utterly devoid of exotic signifiers. The soaring violin melody is strongly suggestive of transcendence, portraying Thaïs' escape from the life of the flesh and her transformation—one might even say transfiguration—into a higher, more spiritual being. To portray this transformation, Massenet uses the “universal” language of European art music, withholding exotic signifiers in favor of a thoroughly Western musical language. The “Meditation” is largely diatonic, the harmonies straightforward and uncomplicated, portraying the chastity and innocence toward which Thaïs now aspires.

Almost immediately following the “Meditation,” a very different sort of music ensues: music studded with exotic markers and bizarre sonorities—music that, I would argue, we are meant to hear as decadent and dangerous. Huebner observes that Thaïs “journeys from the material to the intangible, the impure to the pure, the pagan and dangerously exotic to the Christian. Massenet captures such contrasts with special incisiveness by the aforementioned juxtaposition of the ‘Meditation’ and the ‘Musique de Fête’: the latter is one of the most remarkable orientalist musical effects in the opera with its superimposition of the three rhythmic layers

executed by oboe, cor anglais, celesta, tambour arabe, and finger cymbals.”<sup>139</sup> As Huebner points out, the “Meditation” portrays Thaïs’ transformation from exotic sexpot into a Christian proto-European; thus, the “Meditation” contains no exotic markers, for it portrays Thaïs’ escape from the pagan world of exoticism.

Mélopée Orientale, the number that follows “Meditation,” portrays something quite different. This piece is the second number in a heavily allegorical ballet in which the figure of Perdition visits Athanaël in his sleep and corrupts him. Thus, it portrays Athanaël’s fall from grace. Massenet laces the music of this allegorical ballet with Oriental signifiers to underscore the sensuality, exoticism, and depravity of Perdition.

The orchestration, as Huebner observed in the above-quoted passage, intensifies the Oriental setting. Featuring tambourines, oboe, and finger cymbals, this piece provides maximum contrast to the string-based sonorities in “Meditation.” The harmonies, too, are markedly different. In contrast to the goal-oriented harmonies in the “Meditation,” these harmonies are extremely static. The tonic, B, is incessantly reiterated in the strings, creating the tonal monotony typical of Orientalist musical evocations (ex. 25). The syncopated rhythms in the strings further intensify the bizarre, exotic color of the music, in contrast to the graceful, flowing rhythms in the preceding set piece. Instead of the lyrical violin melody

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<sup>139</sup> Huebner, *Wagnerism and Nationalism*, 152.

N° 2. Allegretto moderato

The musical score is written for piano and bass. It begins with a treble staff and a bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto moderato'. The score consists of five systems of two staves each. The first system shows the initial entry with *sf* (sforzando) markings. The second system features a melodic line in the treble staff with a slur and a crescendo. The third system has a rapid sixteenth-note passage in the treble staff with repeated *sf* markings. The fourth system continues the melodic line with a slur and a crescendo. The fifth system shows a final rapid sixteenth-note passage with repeated *sf* markings. The dynamics include *sf*, *mf*, and 'sempre molto accentuato'.

Example 25. Jules Massenet, *Thaïs*, Mélopée Orientale (1894), mm. 1-10

heard in the ‘Meditation,’ the melody (based largely on scalar runs) is taken by two solo oboes (offering us yet another example of the use of the oboe for Oriental effect). The melody treats the sixth and seventh scale degrees in an unusual way; its modal orientation differs markedly from the warmly diatonic D major of the Meditation.

In the middle section of *Mélopie Orientale*, the tambourines dominate the texture; three tambourines perform a rhythmic ostinato, while the obligatory drone is provided by bassoons and basses. The viola and cello play a B-major melody that quickly morphs into B minor with strong Phrygian inflections (ex. 26). The exotic sound of the tambourines, the long pedal tones in a low register, and the modal weirdness of the melody combine to produce a distinctly exotic effect. All of this serves to underscore Athanaël’s capitulation to the evil pagan world of exoticism, mere moments after Thaïs has succeeded in escaping that world.



Example 26. Jules Massenet, *Thaïs*, *Mélopie Orientale* (1894), mm. 17-20

In the final section of *Mélopée Orientale*, an allegorical representation of lust, with the alluring name La Charmeuse, sings while performing an erotic dance. Significantly, she does not sing any actual words; instead, she vocalizes wordlessly on the syllable “Ah,” over a long, low drone. Her wordless singing intensifies the exotic character of the ballet, for wordless singing (as we have seen) is frequently used to connote the seductive, sensual, feminine qualities ascribed to the Orient. Just as Lakmé performed wordless vocals to portray her alluring, “Oriental” femininity, here La Charmeuse vocalizes wordlessly to represent the irrational, exotic, hedonistic Orient—the world of pagan exoticism, to which Athanaël is succumbing.

The exotic signifiers in this ballet thus perform important semiotic work: they portray sexual excess, a quality often imputed to the Orient. By withholding all exotic markers from Thaïs’ ‘Meditation,’ and making heavy use of these markers in *Perdition*’s ballet, Massenet highlights the stereotype of the Christianized West vs. the morally corrupt Orient.

### ***The French Exotic Tradition As Defined in Primary Sources***

In the preceding sections, I have attempted to demonstrate that musical exoticism constituted a distinct—and salient—strand of French musical culture. Many French books and articles of the time reinforce this perception of exoticism as integral to the French musical tradition. In 1917, for instance, Victor Loret observed that “the taste for Oriental things has always been very strong in



France.”<sup>140</sup> Loret goes on to list some of the many French composers who have written Orientalist music: “Bizet, among us, has shown a passionate oriental instinct and one could say that it is the thoroughly oriental richness of his rhythms that constitute much of the force and the eternal youth of his music. But the source that inspired Bizet is far from being exhausted....Maurice Ravel has already become an orientalist....Many composers have preceded Ravel in the same vein: Emmanuel Chabrier with his celebrated rhapsody *España*, Edouard Lalo with his ballet *Namouna*, Claude Debussy with his elegant *Soirée dans Grenade* and his symphonic suite *Iberia* of which certain pages, especially the first part, evoke all the caressing grace of the Orient.”<sup>141</sup>

By listing some of the many French composers who have written Orientalist works, Loret makes it clear that he views Orientalism as a powerful current in French musical life. Similarly, in 1891 the French music critic H. Barbedette observes that “the airs of the Orient have exercised a sort of fascination on many of our composers. One knows how deeply Félicien David drew on them; they made a profound impression on Bizet; one finds traces of it in his *Hôtesse Arabe*, in many

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<sup>140</sup> “Le goût des choses d’Orient à toujours très vif en France.” Victor Loret, “L’Orientalisme Dans la Musique Française,” *Pour La Musique Française: Douze Causeries* (Paris: Editions Georges Cres et Compagnie, 1917), 147.

<sup>141</sup> “Bizet, chez nous, s’est montré d’instinct orientaliste passionné et l’on peut dire que c’est la richesse tout orientale de ses rythmes qui constitue surtout la force et l’éternelle jeunesse de sa musique. Mais la source où a puisé Bizet est loin d’être tarie...Ravel s’est déjà révélé orientaliste....Plusieurs compositeurs avaient précédé M.Ravel dans la même voie: Emmanuel Chabrier avec sa célèbre rhapsodie *España*, Edouard Lalo avec son ballet *Namouna* et sa brillante *Symphonie Espagnole*, Claude Debussy avec son élégante *Soirée dans Grenade* et sa suite symphonique *Iberia* dont certaines pages, dans la première partie surtout, évoquent étonnamment tout la grace caressante de l’Orient.” Ibid., 170-71.

passages of *Carmen*...M. Saint-Saëns, in his *Suite Algérienne*, has successfully employed these elements.”<sup>142</sup>

Some music critics went even further, implying that France, by virtue of being a Latin, Mediterranean country, had a strong affinity with the exotic. Jean Marnol, for instance, wrote, “The Mediterranean provinces have frequent contact with the Moors; also, they are completely impregnated with Orientalism. It has therefore fallen to us to portray the indolence and the voluptuousness of the Orient...”<sup>143</sup>

Along similar lines, Jean D’Udine wrote, “To those who reproach the French for their passion for exoticism and foreign novelties, I would respond that....by virtue of its middle position, which places it between the zone of Saxon influence and the zone of Latin influence, France presents a marvelously propitious terrain for the development of ideas and serves as an intellectual laboratory for the entire world.”<sup>144</sup> Like Marnol, D’Udine describes France as a country with strong Latin, exotic qualities, owing to its geographical location. Marnol’s and D’Udine’s articles demonstrate that the French exotic tradition was viewed by some fin-de-siècle music critics as a function of France’s geographical position (especially its

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<sup>142</sup> “Les airs d’Orient ont exercé une sorte de fascination sur nombre de nos compositeurs. On sait quel parti en avait tiré Félicien David; Bizet en avait ressenti une impression profonde; on en trouve des traces dans son *Hôtesse Arabe*, dans maints passages de *Carmen*...M. Saint-Saëns, dans sa *Suite Algérienne*, avait déjà fait un emploi heureux de ces éléments.” H. Barbedette, “Paris et Départements,” *Le Ménestrel* 48 (Nov 1891): 367.

<sup>143</sup> “Les provinces méditerranéennes avaient alors avec les Maures des rapports fréquents; aussi étaient-elles tout imprégnées d’orientalisme. Il eût donc fallu nous montrer l’indolence et la volupté d’Orient.” Jean Marnol, “Revue de la Quinzaine,” *S.I.M.* (1905): 403.

<sup>144</sup> “A ceux qui reprochent aux Français leur passion pour l’exotisme et la nouveauté étrangère, on répondra que...En raison de la situation moyenne qui la place à demi-chemin entre la zone d’influence saxonne et la zone d’influence latine, la France présente un terrain merveilleusement propice aux lutes d’idées et sert de laboratoire intellectuel au monde entier.” Jean D’Udine, “Le Gout Musical,” *Le Courrier Musical* 8 (15 Mai 1905): 300.

proximity to Spain). Thus, exoticism was thought of as a quality that was inscribed upon French soil, integral to French culture.

Indeed, many Frenchmen viewed it as their duty to resist influence from Germany, for they viewed German influence as inimical to the Latinate, Oriental spirit of France. This anti-German, pro-exotic attitude is reflected in an 1884 article in the music periodical *Le Ménestrel*: “I resolutely turn my back on the North....and I refuse to watch the sun setting in the Northern world. I am one of those who obstinately, invincibly, linger and take heart from looking to the left and watching the sun rise on the vermilion coast of the Orient. I am Latin to the bone.”<sup>145</sup> Here, the author, Arthur Pougin, implies that his love of the Orient, accompanied by his innate resistance to German influence, stems from his Latinate French heritage. He suggests that Orientalism is an antidote to German influence, and an expression of Latin Frenchness. As we will see, this view of Orientalism as an anti-German, pro-French movement will become extremely important in French musical culture.

Orientalism was often figured as a specifically French national movement, something that belonged to France and reflected the French national spirit. Germanic influence, especially the baleful influence of Wagner, was often considered a threat to the French exotic tradition. For instance, in 1890 R.-A. de Saint-Laurent lamented that some French composers had fallen under Wagner’s sway and, as a result, had lost touch with the native French tradition of exoticism. He opens his article by praising French exoticism as a brilliant and effective genre:

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<sup>145</sup> “Je tourne résolument le dos à ce Nord...je me refuse à voir sortir la lumière du monde du septentrion. Je suis du ceux qui obstinément, invinciblement, s’attardent à prendre le Cœur à gauche et à regarder le soleil se lever du côté de l’Orient vermeil. Je suis latin jusqu’aux moelles.” Arthur Pougin, “Paris et Départements,” *Le Ménestrel* 51 (1884): 55.

“Perhaps the most striking work, due to its use of local color, *The Désert* by Félicien David, was followed by numerous remarkable works....*Carmen* where all of Spain comes alive with the savage passion of its gypsies....*Lackmé* (sic) which brings us India, a country of mystical dreams...”<sup>146</sup>

Saint-Laurent then asserts that some French composers are abandoning the genre of exoticism, due to Wagner’s Germanic influence: “Today, music rapidly detaches itself more and more from a fecund genre. It gives its sympathies to a completely different, and even contradictory, genre. It follows the path opened by the innovative giant of Bayreuth. Now, Wagner never uses local color. It is completely incompatible with the character of his work...The Wagnerian school remains, following the example of its master, supremely indifferent to all forms of local color and it disdainfully rejects local color as banal, hackneyed, and somewhat childish.”<sup>147</sup>

In this passage, Saint-Laurent implies that exoticism is an important aspect of French compositional style, and he laments what he perceives as its marginalization in the face of Wagnerian influence. By pointing out that exoticism is utterly incompatible with the Wagnerian school, Saint-Laurent is figuring exoticism as the

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<sup>146</sup> “L’oeuvre la plus frappante peut-être, due à l’emploi de la couleur locale, le Désert de Félicien David, a été suivie de nombreux et remarquables ouvrages.... *Carmen* où vit toute l’Espagne avec la sauvage passion de ses Gitanas... *Lackmé* qui nous révèle l’Inde, pays du rêve mystique.” R.-A. de Saint-Laurent, “De la Couleur Locale en Musique,” *Le Guide Musical* 11 (16 Mars 1890), 81.

<sup>147</sup> La Musique se détache aujourd’hui de plus en plus d’un genre trop rapidement fécond. Elle a donné ses sympathies à un genre tout différent et même contradictoire. Elle suit la voie ouverte par le gigantesque novateur de Bayreuth. Or, Wagner n’emploie jamais la couleur locale. Celle-ci était d’ailleurs absolument incompatible avec le caractère de son oeuvre....L’École Wagnérienne reste, à l’exemple du Maître, superbement indifférente à tout souci de couleur locale et la rejette dédaigneusement comme banale, usée et tant soit peu puérile.” Ibid., 82.

antithesis of Wagnerian opera.<sup>148</sup> He urges French composers to overthrow Wagnerian influence and reconnect with their indigenous tradition of exoticism.

In subsequent chapters, we will discover that this is exactly what many French composers (especially Debussy) did. In fact, in 1923 Henri Lichtenberger asserted that French composers had finally succeeded in purging Wagner's influence from French music, thanks in part to their use of exotic markers:

Among us, especially in France, his [Wagner's] influence is singularly reduced today, due to advances in music...Wagnerism used to be a veritable obsession; one saw the upsurge everywhere of innumerable copies of *Tristan*, the *Tetralogy* and *Parsifal*; people asked themselves if this exclusive favor did not threaten the originality of our artists. Today all of this has changed. Our horizon is prodigiously enlarged....we have tasted all the musical folklore of the West, the East and even the Far East. And, finally, we have become fully ourselves again. Neither Debussian impressionism nor contemporary expressionism owes anything more to Wagner.<sup>149</sup>

In this passage Lichtenberger suggests that musical exoticism—the East and even the Far East, as he puts it—enabled French composers such as Debussy to become themselves again, to rediscover musical Frenchness and overthrow the contaminating influence of German music. The story of how this occurred—how exotic markers became a set of anti-Wagnerian tools—is the central story of this dissertation, and one that will be told much more fully in Chapter 3.

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<sup>148</sup> In the following chapter of this dissertation, we shall see that this notion of exoticism as an antithesis of Wagner surfaces again and again in the French press.

<sup>149</sup> “Chez nous, en France, tout particulièrement, son influence s’est aujourd’hui singulièrement réduite chez les avancés de la musique....Le wagnérisme exerçait une véritable hantise; on voyait de toute part surgir d’innombrables copies de *Tristan*, de la *Tetralogie* ou de *Parsifal*; on se demandait si cette faveur exclusive ne menaçait pas d’étouffer l’originalité de nos artistes. Aujourd’hui tout est change. Notre horizon s’est prodigieusement élargi...nous avons goûté à tout le folklore musical d’Occident, d’Orient et même d’Extrême-Orient.” Henri Lichtenberger, “Wagner et l’Opinion Contemporaine,” *La Revue Musicale* 4:4 (Aug 1923): 84-85.

### *Exoticism, Inauthenticity, and Frenchness*

As many scholars (then and now) have observed, exotic musical markers bear very little relation to the actual stylistic features of non-Western musical traditions. Jonathan Bellman points out that “musical exoticism is not equivalent to ethnomusicological verisimilitude...Exoticism is not about the earnest study of foreign cultures; it is about drama, effect, and evocation. The listener is intrigued, hears something new and savory, but is not aurally destabilized enough to feel uncomfortable.”<sup>150</sup>

I would add that this view of non-Western music as aurally destabilizing is confirmed in an 1889 French review of Egyptian music: “Those who dream somewhat, who have fabricated for themselves an ideal Orient through the conventional lens of artists, are really disappointed. Hey! Is this the dance of the Egyptians? Could it be such rude spectacles that the potentates of the crescent-moon relish in the secrecy of their harem?...How far from the smallest oriental ballet in the Opera, how vulgar, how unlike the descriptions of writers or the striking images of the painters are these obscene calls of girls moving rhythmically to a barbaric motive, the precise opposite of those accents that our Western musical language applies to express the infinite voluptuousness of the flesh....”<sup>151</sup> The author of this article, Ibrahim, poignantly contrasts the Western fantasy of exoticism

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<sup>150</sup> Jonathan Bellman, “Introduction,” *The Exotic in Western Music* xii-xiii.

<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Fauser, *Musical Encounters*, 114. “Ceux qui rêvent quelque peu, qui se sont fabriqués un Orient idéal à travers l’optique conventionnelle des artistes, éprouvent une déception véritable. Hé quoi! C’est cela, la danse des almées? C’est à ces grossiers spectacles que les potentates du Croissant se délectent dans le mystère des harems? . . . Combien éloignés du moindre ballet oriental à l’Opéra, combien vulgaires, combien différentes des descriptions d’écrivains ou des fulgurantes toiles de peintres sont ces obscènes appels de filles rythmés sur un motif barbare, antipode des accents que nos langues musicales d’Occident appliquent à l’expression des voluptés infinies de la chair. . . .”

with the disappointing reality; he makes it clear that he much prefers the domesticated, “French” form of exoticism, which strikes him as infinitely superior to the sound of actual non-Western music.

In 1880, Octave Fouqué expressed a similar view when he criticized Reyer’s Orientalist symphony *Selam* for being too authentically—and hence unappealingly—exotic: “Evidently the preoccupation of Mr. Ernest Reyer, in writing his descriptive symphony, was to portray it [the Orient] more accurately than Félicien David. But the absolute truth is never best appreciated in the theater.”<sup>152</sup> Here, Fouqué implies that the fantasy of the Orient is far more appealing than the reality, at least in the theater. D.C. Parker suggests that not only audience members, but also composers, prefer Orientalist fantasies to the real Orient; he writes that the French composer “may, thinking of the irksomeness of travel and the beauties of his own country, hesitate to undertake the physical journey; he seldom hesitates to undertake the imaginative one. Magic carpets have fewer terrors than the most luxurious liner, and one can go far upon them without parting from home comforts.”<sup>153</sup>

As these passages suggest, exotic signifiers were recognized as inauthentic, for a great number of 19<sup>th</sup> (and early 20<sup>th</sup>) century musicians acknowledged that exotic markers were the product of the French imagination. Relevant in this regard are the remarks of Catalan pianist Joaquín Nin (a contemporary of Debussy’s). In 1912, Nin observed that Debussy and Ravel’s evocations of Spain are more French than

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<sup>152</sup> “Évidemment la préoccupation de M. Ernest Reyer, en écrivant sa symphonie descriptive, avait été de se montrer plus vrai que Félicien David. Mais le vrai absolu n’est jamais le mieux apprécié au théâtre.” Octave Fouqué, “De Paris,” *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* 47 (1880): 251.

<sup>153</sup> D.C. Parker, *Georges Bizet: His Life and Works* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926), 184–85.

Spanish: “Certainly, Debussy and Ravel recently had fun with composing some Spanish pieces, indeed very successfully; but these works here are basically very French. Their content, very freely treated, is invariably French.”<sup>154</sup> Nin was not the only musician to make this point. Many late 19<sup>th</sup>-century commentators on music observed that musical exoticism is essentially French in origin, sound, and style. For instance, in 1892, music critic Arthur Pougin observes that Delibes’ exotic opera *Lakmé* is thoroughly French: “Parisian at heart, the composer [Delibes] indicated the oriental color of his subject through the appropriate use of modal and tonal ambiguities.”<sup>155</sup>

In 19<sup>th</sup>-century writings on music, Bizet was frequently praised for his uncanny ability to portray the exotic in a vivid, compelling fashion, with very little recourse to genuine exotic music and an undeniable reliance on imagination rather than quotation. Victor Loret, for instance, points out that “the Orientalism of Bizet was an Orientalism of instinct, a natural Orientalism that did not result from the specialized study of Arabic music.”<sup>156</sup> Similarly, Paul Landormy marvels at the richness of Bizet’s imagination and flair for exoticism: “In writing *Carmen*, Bizet succeeded in giving us such savory impressions of local color...Like many other

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<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Robert F. Waters, *Déodat de Séverac: Musical Identity in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 192. “Certes, Debussy et Ravel, tout récemment encore, se sont amusés à composer quelques espagnolades d’ailleurs très réussies, mais ces oeuvres-là sont quand même foncièrement françaises. Leur matière—très librement traitée—invariablement française.”

<sup>155</sup> “Parisien dans l’âme, le compositeur avait tout au plus indiqué la couleur orientale de son sujet par quelques indécisions voulues de mode et de tonalité.” Arthur Pougin, “Semaine Theatrale,” *Le Ménestrel* (Dimanche 11 Decembre 1892), 394.

<sup>156</sup> “L’orientalisme de Bizet fut un orientalisme d’instinct, un orientalisme naturel qui ne résultait pas d’études spéciales sur la musique arabe.” Loret, “L’orientalisme,” 158.



artists, poets, or musicians, he preferred to paint the Spain of his imagination.”<sup>157</sup> Quittard, too, points to Bizet’s knack for pseudo-exotic evocation. In a review of Bourgault-Ducoudray’s exotic opera *Thamara*, he observes that “*Thamara* is Oriental in the same way that *Carmen* is Spanish, without a single authentic motive.”<sup>158</sup> Raoul Laparra also highlights the inauthenticity of Bizet’s “Spanish” music: “The work of Bizet strongly indicates some of the traits of the Spanish musical character; nevertheless, it is generally known that Bizet invented, rather than drew upon, Spanish music, as if there were no music in Spain.”<sup>159</sup>

### ***French Colonialism***

The French interest in exoticism did not exist in a political vacuum. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the heyday of the French exotic craze, France was an active colonial power. For instance, in 1830 France invaded Algeria. French identity was very much wrapped up in this conquest. In 1839, the French parliament declared Algeria “a land forever French.”<sup>160</sup> As Todd Shephard points out, “From the 1830’s on, French officials maintained that Algerian territory was

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<sup>157</sup> Paul Landormy, “Variété—un inédit de Bizet,” *Revue Musicale* 13 (Fevrier 1923): 287. “En écrivant *Carmen*, Bizet a réussi à nous donner des impressions de couleur locale tellement savoureuse.... Comme tant d’autres artistes, poètes ou musiciens, il aurait préféré peindre l’Espagne d’imagination.”

<sup>158</sup> Henri Quittard, “Thamara,” *Revue Musicale* 6 (1906): 173. “*Thamara* est orientale comme *Carmen* est espagnole, sans qu’un seul motif authentique.”

<sup>159</sup> “L’oeuvre de Bizet a puissamment indiqué un des traits du caractère musical espagnol; néanmoins, il est resté généralement convenu comme si Bizet eût inventé, et non tiré parti qu’en Espagne il n’y a pas de musique.” Raoul Laparra, “La Musique et la Danse Populaires en Espagne,” *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire de Conservatoire*, ed. Lionel de la Laurencie, 2353.

<sup>160</sup> Quoted in Todd Shephard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 20.

part of France and that Algeria's inhabitants were all French subjects."<sup>161</sup> In a sense, then, French national identity was defined in part through identification with exotic peoples.

But this identification did not place the colonial subjects on an equal footing with French people. France was defining the terms of this identification. The French government had power over Algeria, and it had the authority to impose French laws on the Algerian subjects. In fact, the French government abused its power over its colonies. According to Lawrence Kramer, "The French government exploited the wealth of its colonies in equatorial Africa at second hand, by means of concessionary companies that routinely depended on brutal forced labor to extract ivory, rubber, and mahogany from the jungle and to work on the railway running from the Atlantic to Brazzaville."<sup>162</sup> Thus, the French identification with the exotic was shaped by an imbalance of power, in which France plundered the colonies for resources.

How did French colonial policy, rife with abuse and oppression of the other, shape the French tradition of musical exoticism? The relationship between French colonial practice and artistic representations of exoticism is complex. Many French Orientalist works seem to avoid direct engagement with French colonial practice. Madeleine Dobie explores this apparent disconnect between French colonial policy and French Orientalist art: "Characteristic of mid-nineteenth-century Orientalism is a structure of relative *dissociation* by which creative artists acknowledged Europe's

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 204.

encroachment into the Orient yet failed to address the military or political consequences of this venture.”<sup>163</sup> Dobie speculates that French artists may have felt guilty about the abusive power structure of French colonialism—even as they drew their interest in the Orient from that very colonial structure.<sup>164</sup>

This guilt may have led French artists to avoid confronting colonial issues directly; instead, these artists may have preferred to seek refuge in an idealized, apolitical notion of the Orient. Moreover, as Dobie suggests, some artists may have been troubled by the changes that French colonies underwent. Governed by French laws, many of these colonies lost some of their native traditions and became more Western.<sup>165</sup> In short, the Orient was becoming less Oriental. The ancient Orient, perceived as a pristine site untouched by Westernization, became an object of nostalgia. In 1899, the French novelist Louis Bertrand (1866-1941) articulated this poignantly when he wrote: “There is an Orleanist [French] Algiers which...does not have the grandeur or style of the ancient city.”<sup>166</sup> Seth Graebner explains that, for Bertrand, “Nostalgia remains the affective mode of colonial history.”<sup>167</sup>

In keeping with this nostalgic attitude toward colonial rule, many French operas depict a precolonial, ancient Orient. Massenet’s *Thais* is set in ancient Egypt, while Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila* is set in the Biblical Orient. Delibes’ *Lakme*

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<sup>163</sup> Madeleine Dobie, *Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 149.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Seth Graebner, *History’s Place: Nostalgia and the City in French Algerian Literature* (Lanham: Lexington Book, 2007), 48.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

presents an especially interesting example of avoidance and denial: *Lakmé* depicts British colonial rule in India, rather than addressing French colonial rule in countries such as Algeria. Thus, the French colonial tradition is an absent presence in many of these French Orientalist operas. This tradition is one of the reasons for French interest in the Orient, yet the operas tend to displace French colonialism onto safer topics, such as the ancient Orient or the British colonial tradition. In the next chapter, we will see how Debussy engages with the French exotic tradition and its attendant nostalgia.

### *Debussy and the Exotic*

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, musical exoticism was, as we have now had ample opportunity to see, a firmly established tradition in France, with a firmly established vocabulary of exotic signifiers. This vocabulary, as we have observed, was relatively stable, varying little from composer to composer, functioning as a lingua franca in which the majority of French composers were highly fluent. Such was its stability that the same markers were used in nearly all French exotic works, regardless of whether the composer was evoking Spain, Egypt, India, or any other exotic locale. For instance, Delibes' evocation of India in *Lakmé* differs little in its essentials from, say, Massenet's evocation of ancient Egypt in *Thaïs*: both make use of wordless vocals, stasis, oboe solos, modality, and syncopated rhythms. Thus, the exotic vocabulary consisted of a stable—some might even say rigid—set of markers.

Thus, as Debussy was reaching compositional maturity in the early 1890's, a fixed, stable vocabulary of exotic signifiers was available to him as a French composer. And, as a French composer who was deeply invested in writing self-consciously French music, this vocabulary of signifiers would have struck him as highly appealing, for it was a vocabulary that was in essence (for all its claims to represent the Other) deeply *French*. It was of French provenance (having been developed by the French composer David and further elaborated by subsequent French composers such as Bizet) and it was an integral part of many French operas (and even some instrumental works as well, although we have not examined those here). As I will argue, Debussy was drawn to musical exoticism because it enabled him to tie his music to a long-standing French tradition, giving him a musical vocabulary through which he could signal his nationalistic attachment to France. Now that we have surveyed the French exotic tradition, it is time now to turn to Debussy's own evocations of exoticism, in order to examine the ways in which he engaged with the tradition he had inherited.

In the following chapter, I have categorized Debussy's exotic evocations by locale, so that his Egyptian-themed works are discussed in one section, followed by his works that deal with the Far East, and so on. This system of classification highlights Debussy's interest in a wide range of exotic regions. Moreover, categorizing the pieces by location allows us to grasp the versatility of the French exotic markers. In the hands of Debussy and other French composers, these markers are used for a wide variety of geographical locations. The flexibility of these markers reflects their essential *Frenchness*. If these markers can represent

virtually any exotic country, then the markers are probably not intended to evoke the specific sounds of any particular non-Western musical tradition. Rather, the markers are French in origin—French signifiers of a generalized exoticism.

## *Chapter Two: Musical Exoticism in Debussy*

### *Debussy's Egyptian-Themed Works*

Egypt was, as we have seen, a favored locale among French composers; indeed, the inaugural work that launched the exotic tradition, *Le Désert*, evokes Egypt (and was based on impressions gathered by David during his sojourn in Egypt), and many subsequent French composers followed suit and wrote Egyptian-themed music. Massenet's *Thaïs*, for instance, is set in Egypt; similarly, Saint-Saëns' *Piano Concerto No. 5* evokes Egypt and quotes an Egyptian folk song. Debussy, too, inherited from his French predecessors an intense interest in portraying Egypt musically. Debussy wrote, "My favorite music is those few notes an Egyptian shepherd plays on his flute: he is a part of the landscape around him, and he knows harmonies that aren't in our books."<sup>168</sup> In this passage, Debussy romanticizes the Egyptian shepherd, casting him as an Arcadian figure in harmony with nature, unfettered by the stultifying effects of book-learning. But this passage is perhaps a bit disingenuous, for Debussy's Egyptian pieces use harmonies, and tropes, that *are* in our books—they use the lexicon of exotic signifiers passed down from one French composer to the next.

Debussy's *Pour L'Égyptienne*, for instance, draws heavily on the exotic signifiers available within the French tradition. This work, which began life as a piece of incidental music for Pierre Louÿs' *Chansons de Bilitis*, has received little scholarly attention—but is richly deserving of analysis. I am basing my analysis on

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<sup>168</sup> Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, 48

Debussy's piano arrangement, which he completed in 1915 as the fifth piece in *Six Épigrapbes Antiques*. The first 30 measures of this 50-measure work are underpinned by a tonic drone. This drone enhances the exotic setting and links the work to the French exotic tradition, in which stasis plays a prominent role as an exotic marker. In addition to the drone bass, several other aspects contribute to the static effect. Throughout much of the work, the middle voice is rooted on a single chord consisting of the notes Gb-C-D. This chord sounds continually from mm. 3-14, briefly disappearing in mm. 15-17, and returning as a cadential gesture in m. 18 (ex. 27, mm. 1-14). It is less prominent in the slightly more active middle section, but it returns in m. 43 and continues to the end, where it (in conjunction with the drone bass on Eb and Bb) forms the basis of the concluding cadence.

If the harmonies remain rooted to a few anchoring sonorities, the melody is much freer. Rhapsodic and improvisatory, the melody unfurls, arabesque-like, above the static lower parts. But even the melody, though markedly more active than the harmonies, sounds languorous rather than goal-directed. Like many French exotic works, Debussy makes use of descending chromatic lines: the melody is thick with half-steps, lazily winding its way through florid arabesques. Augmented seconds also figure prominently in the melody, intensifying the exotic effect.

Debussy's *Canope*, the tenth prelude in Book Two, offers another example of his interest in Egypt. With a less sexual—although no less exotic—context, *Canope* presents a musical portrait of an Egyptian urn. The exoticism suggested by this title is similar to the Saint-Saëns *Dance of the Priestesses*, examined above.



## Pour l'Égyptienne

Très modéré ♩. 58

*pp* aussi doux que possible *pp* sans répéter m.g.

*librement expressif*

*p*

*p*

*p*

*cédez - - // mouvt*

*p*

*p*

Example 27. Claude Debussy, *L'Égyptienne* (1915), mm. 1-14

Both works represent an exotic, archaic world, a world whose distance from Judeo-Christian Europe is underscored by allusions to paganism. The Saint-Saëns dance features a group of pagan (specifically, Philistine) women who worship the heathen God Dagon. In *Canope*, a similar exotic-archaic-pagan context pertains: this work represents an ancient Egyptian burial urn; hence, it alludes to the pagan rituals and beliefs of the Egyptians. The similarities between these two works underscore Debussy's participation in the French tradition of musical exoticism.

But, compared to Saint-Saëns, Debussy makes a much more pervasive, structurally significant use of the markers of this tradition. In *Canope*, Debussy uses modality to evoke the exoticism—and archaism—of ancient Egypt. But the role of modality in this work goes far beyond picturesque local color. That is, Debussy is not just using modality to lend an air of quaint exoticism to the piece. He is also using it as a musical resource that generates significant structural events. Indeed, in this work, modality exerts a profound influence on voice-leading, structure, harmony, and melody—in other words, virtually every parameter of this work reflects a modal, rather than tonal, orientation. As we shall see, this orientation is projected in part through Debussy's prominent emphasis on modal scale degrees—that is, notes which differ from a major or minor scale.

The very first harmonic progression in the piece—the first two chords in m. 1—moves from the tonic to the minor dominant (ex. 28, mm. 1-16). This progression calls attention to the lowered seventh scale degree. I consider this tone a modal scale degree because, in tonally functional music, the dominant triad is usually major. The third chord in m. 1, a major triad built on the lowered seventh

Très calme et doucement triste

pp

*cedez*

5 *mouv.*

*m.g. m.d.*

9 *p*

13 *p*

Example 28. Claude Debussy, *Canope*, Prelude X (1912-1913), mm. 1-16

scale degree, further reinforces the modal character of the piece. The modal coloration becomes even heavier with the first chord in m. 2, an E-minor triad containing the raised sixth scale degree. This Dorian inflection reinforces the modal character of the phrase, especially in light of the lowered seventh degrees in the previous measure. With the occurrence of a G-minor triad on the third beat of m. 2, the sixth scale degree is variable, suggesting a possible shift between Aeolian and Dorian. Shifting modality, created by a variable sixth scale degree, is something that we have already observed in Massenet's *Hérodiade* as a feature of musical exoticism.

In *Canope*, modal scale degrees are important not only on the local level of chord-to-chord successions, but also on a deeper structural level. The pitch C—the subtonic of D minor—plays a structurally important role throughout *Canope*; indeed, it even seems to compete with the tonal center, D, for supremacy and prominence. As James Baker points out, “The tonality of ‘Canope’ is ambivalent, hovering between D minor and C major.”<sup>169</sup>

The pitch C first starts to become important in m. 3, although its importance is perhaps foreshadowed before this, when it is harmonized with the only major chord in the first phrase. In m. 3, the right hand's cadence on D is weakened by the descending fifth, G-C, in the left hand. C remains an important secondary (and at times primary) key area throughout the piece; indeed, even when the tonic D is in the bass in mm. 7-9 (ex. 28), it sounds more like V/V in C major rather than I of D.

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<sup>169</sup> James M. Baker, “Post-Tonal Voice-Leading,” *Models of Musical Analysis*, ed. Jonathan Dunsby (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 30.

In fact, the V/G chord in mm. 7-9 resolves to a G chord in m. 12, which functions as V/C. The C Major triad itself appears in m. 14, alternating plagally with its subdominant. In mm. 17-22, V of D alternates with V of C, reinforcing the listeners' perception of C as an important pitch in this work. Indeed, the final cadence is on a C Major triad—but this triad includes D as an added ninth. Hence, Debussy includes the ostensible tonic D in the final C Major chord, highlighting the tonal ambiguity of this work (ex. 29, mm. 30-33).



Example 29. Claude Debussy, *Canope*, Prelude X (1912-1913), mm. 30-33

Even though C Major receives a largely functional, tonal treatment in this piece, the very prominence of C—the subtonic of D minor—reflects a modal, rather than tonal orientation. That is, C belongs to a modal (Aeolian or Dorian) version of D minor, not a tonal D minor. Therefore, it is a modal, not a tonal, scale degree which receives heavy structural emphasis in this work. In brief, modal collections inform the syntax and structure of *Canope*.

### *Far Eastern Exoticism*

As we observed in *La Princesse Jaune*, Saint-Saëns portrayed the exoticism of the Far East through a heavy use of pentatonic sonorities and static harmonies. Debussy makes a similar move in his piano piece *Pagodes*, the first piece in his set *Estampes* (1903). Drenched in pentatonicism and drones, this piece evokes Eastern temples. *Pagodes* has received extensive scholarly attention, but I am the first scholar to link Debussy's pentatonic procedures in *Pagodes* to the exotic vocabulary used by his French predecessors. Mervyn Cooke, for example, attempts to link the pentatonicism in *Pagodes* to the influence of gamelan music, rather than the influence of French Orientalism: "the confluence of pentatonicism and stratified polyphony [in *Pagodes*] is sufficiently striking to render a direct gamelan stimulus plausible."<sup>170</sup>

But, as Cooke implicitly acknowledges, what he calls a "direct gamelan stimulus" is actually rather indirect; the alleged "gamelan" elements of *Pagodes* are, he admits, thoroughly Westernized. In the following quote, Cooke points out that *Pagodes* is more Western than Eastern in its tonal orientation: "What is most significant (and usually overlooked) about this celebrated opening, however, is how Debussy anchors his pentatonic scale firmly to the B major triad contained within its five pitches, and even goes so far as to include a B major key signature with its unnecessary A-sharp. This passage, a notably early fusion of Eastern and Western tonal procedures, reflects Debussy's inevitably Westernized perception of the

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<sup>170</sup> Mervyn Cooke, "The East in the West," *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 260.

gamelan's pentatonic tuning."<sup>171</sup> I agree with Cooke that *Pagodes* incorporates its pentatonic material within a Western framework, but I would go even further than Cooke in emphasizing the Western orientation of this work. Indeed, I would argue that this work uses a thoroughly Western musical language. In other words, *Pagodes* uses a musical language that was developed by Western (specifically, French) composers to represent the non-Western world.

In *Pagodes*, based largely on a B-pentatonic scale, Debussy exploits the potential nonfunctionality of pentatonicism; he explores non-triadic sonorities within a pentatonic context. Indeed, it is apparent from the first measure that triadic harmonies will not necessarily be the point of reference; the piece begins with a gong-like open fifth, B-F#. The third is absent from this sonority; in the second half of the measure, it is G#, not D#, which is added to the opening dyad, creating a non-triadic chord. This early emphasis on G#, the submediant, will have significant repercussions later in the piece, where G-sharp becomes an important secondary key area. Indeed, its future importance is prefigured already in the first phrase, where G# repeats, drone-like, throughout mm. 1-10 (ex. 30, mm. 1-10).

The effect of these repeated G-sharps, combined with the drone bass emphasizing a bare fifth, is markedly static and nonteleological. The static prominence of G# is reinforced by the contour of the main melody (the melody is first stated in m. 3, and is repeated in m. 7, m. 9, and so forth). This melody begins on G#, rises to the G# an octave higher, then winds its way back down to the initial G#. The melody is hence framed by the pitch-class G#. The static sound-world of

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 260-61.

## I PAGODES

**Modérément animé** *délicatement et presque sans nuances*

PIANO *pp m.d. m.g.*

2 *Rit.*

4 *a tempo* *rit.* *a tempo* *rit.*

7 *a tempo* *rit.* *a tempo*

10

Example 30. Claude Debussy, *Pagodes* (1903), mm. 1-10



this piece is, as we have already observed, a hallmark of musical exoticism. What differentiates this piece from the others we have examined is the prominent role of pentatonicism. That is, the static harmonies in this work are drawn from a pentatonic collection. Debussy takes advantage of the fact that pentatonicism places severe limits on harmonic variety; he uses this lack of variety to create a static sound—a sound that is, as we have seen, coded as a marker of exoticism.

The static harmonic and melodic profile of *Pagodes*, which links this work to the tradition of musical exoticism, has not been thoroughly explored by other scholars. Perhaps because the pentatonicism in *Pagodes* is so strikingly pervasive, it tends to dominate theorists' analyses of this work, eclipsing other important (and related) aspects of this work such as harmonic and melodic stasis. Even Jeremy Day-O'Connell, who presents a highly detailed analysis of *Pagodes*, maintains a fairly narrow focus on its pentatonic organization, to the exclusion of its other features. Indeed, Day-O'Connell explicitly presents his analysis of *Pagodes* as a study of its pentatonicism: "One of Debussy's most famous pentatonic efforts, *Pagodes*, is such a work, exemplary for its subtle, atmospheric—in a word, Impressionistic—use of pentatonicism."<sup>172</sup> In other words, he frames *Pagodes* as a case study in pentatonic usage.

Day-O'Connell's emphasis on pentatonicism makes sense in the context of his book, which explores the use of pentatonic collections in Western art music. Because of his focus on pentatonicism, he makes only a passing reference to one of the most salient elements of this work: its drone bass. He writes, "A fully pentatonic

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<sup>172</sup> Day-O'Connell, *Pentatonicism*, 171-2.

theme soon emerges in measure 11, and as it does, the bass makes its first move away from the tonic, to a submediant pedal. The contrasting material at measure 15 presents an understated scalar shift to the pentatonic scale of V.”<sup>173</sup> Here, Day-O’Connell mentions that “the bass makes its first move away from the tonic” in measure 11. Building on his work, I would add that this is a striking feature of *Pagodes*: a tonic chord that lasts for 10 measures produces a remarkably static sound.

With respect to the pentatonic organization of this piece, it is important to note that the first four measures use only the five notes of the B pentatonic scale—that is, B Major without the fourth or seventh scale degrees. The first slight departure from this scale occurs in m. 5, where an A-natural appears. Significantly, this departure from unalloyed pentatonicism serves to further weaken the tonal functionality—A-natural is the lowered seventh scale degree; therefore, it lacks the directionality associated with the raised leading tone (which in B Major would be A-sharp). Even when the raised leading tone does occur, in mm. 7-9, it functions mainly as a passing tone in an inner voice; it does not imply a tonic-dominant progression. Indeed, the persistent tonic drone in the bass effectively precludes a tonic-dominant progression.

If mm. 7-10 provide a hint of diatonicism (with the appearance of scale degrees 4 and 7), pentatonicism reasserts itself in m. 11 (ex. 31, mm. 11-23). In this

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 172.

Musical score for Claude Debussy's *Pagodes* (1903), measures 11-23. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features complex textures with triplets, arpeggios, and various dynamics including piano (*p*), *poco cresc.*, and pianissimo (*pp*). Performance markings include "Animez un peu" and "Toujours animé". A "Ped." (pedal) marking is present at the bottom of the first system.

Example 31. Claude Debussy, *Pagodes* (1903), mm. 11-23

measure, a fully pentatonic theme appears, underpinned by a pedal on G#. The prominence of G# in this passage—it is important in the theme as well as in the bass—is hardly surprising, given the salience that this pitch has assumed since the beginning. Indeed, it seems perfectly logical—even inevitable—that this pitch should be featured as a drone bass. Mm. 15-18 present a brief chromatic interlude, providing some contrast with the preceding pentatonic phrases. But in m. 19, the music returns to a predominantly pentatonic sound-world; the ostinato figure D#-C#, first initiated in m. 14, continues until m. 22. From mm. 19-23, the bass line descends from G#-B, creating goal-oriented motion leading toward the tonic. But even this motion is, in a sense, non-functional. In a tonally functional work, motion towards the tonic often involves a dominant-tonic cadence. But dominant-tonic polarity is conspicuously absent from this passage; here, the polarity (if one can even call it that) is between G# and B, not F# and B. In fact, F# is noticeably absent from the descending bass line in mm. 19-23: the bass line, which is predominantly stepwise, actually *skips* F#; the notes in the bass line are G#, E, D#, C#, and B.

The arrival on B in m. 23 initiates a varied reprise of the initial melody (the melody first heard in m. 3). Mm. 21-32 are fully pentatonic, using only the pitches of the B-pentatonic scale. Reinforcing the non-tertiary basis of this piece, mm. 27-30 contain a string of parallel fourths and fifths, providing an organum-like accompaniment to the melody in the bass (ex. 32, mm. 27-38).

After eleven measures of pure pentatonicism, the chromatic pitch E-sharp in m. 33 may come as a surprise. Although we could hear this pitch in functional

**Revenez au 1<sup>o</sup> Tempo**

27 *pp*

30 *rit.* *m.g.* *m.d.* \*

33 *Sans lenteur* *p*

37 *dans une sonorité plus claire* *p*

Example 32. Claude Debussy, *Pagodes* (1903), mm. 27-38

terms as a leading-tone to the dominant, this pitch could also be interpreted as a Lydian inflection. Such an interpretation suggests that *Pagodes* uses not only pentatonicism and stasis to create an exotic sound, but also modality. Hence, hearing the E-sharp as a Lydian inflection enriches our understanding of exoticism in this work.

But the E# also has pentatonic connotations, as Day-O'Connell observes: "The e# in measure 33 renders a curious effect, one that capitalizes on the pentatonic circumstances, for it represents the chromaticization of a scale degree not yet heard melodically... At the same time, it appears alongside the pitches of the home pentatonic scale, forming an unprecedented melodic tritone with the crucial incipit d#-c#-b, the very segment of the home pentatonic scale that has not sounded all these thirty-some measures."<sup>174</sup> Thus, the E# serves a dual function: it acts as a modal inflection and it also contributes to a pentatonic collection. Both of these functions are tied to exoticism, for modality and pentatonicism are exotic signifiers.

The modal inflection introduced by E# soon disappears, ushering in a return to complete pentatonicism in m. 37. This return confirms the centrality of the pentatonic scale as a basis of this piece. Mm. 37-44 make a varied return to the initial theme. An open fifth on the dominant appears in m. 37. This is the first instance of anything resembling a dominant chord. The unprecedented appearance of the dominant is perhaps causally related to the E# of the previous phrase (since the E# could be heard as a leading tone to the dominant, perhaps helping to usher in the appearance of the dominant itself). But even here, in m. 37 where the dominant chord finally appears, non-functional harmonies continue to prevail. The dominant chord does not behave in a functional manner; it does not lead to a tonic triad, and it is missing its third, which deprives it of a leading tone.

In mm. 45-52, mm. 33-36 are restated with some variation; a recapitulation then ensues, lasting until m. 73 (ex. 33, mm. 45-53). At this point, the music

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 175-76.



Example 33. Claude Debussy, *Pagodes* (1903), mm. mm. 45-53

diverges from the previous section and introduces new material (although this material is based on earlier sections). An ostinato, C#-D#, continues throughout; this ostinato is familiar from previous sections, and therefore acts as a unifying element.

The music departs from pure pentatonicism in m. 78, with the repeated A-sharps. A-sharp is, however, not treated as a functional leading-tone to B. The A# vanishes in m. 88, and pentatonicism is restored, lasting for the remainder of the piece. In keeping with the non-functional harmonic language of this work, there is

no final cadence as such; the only quasi-cadential move is C# descending to B in the bass in mm. 94-95 (ex. 34, mm. 92-98). But this bass motion is not supported by a chord progression, and therefore does not take place within a functional context.

The musical score for Example 34, Claude Debussy's *Pagodes* (1903), measures 92-98, is presented in three systems. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system (measures 92-94) shows a treble staff with rapid triplet runs and a bass staff with sustained chords. The second system (measures 95-96) continues the triplet runs in the treble and the sustained bass. The third system (measures 97-98) is marked "Retenu" and "aussi pp que possible" (as soft as possible). It features the same triplet runs, but the bass staff has a final measure with a sustained chord marked "(laissez vibrer)" (let it vibrate).

Example 34. Claude Debussy, *Pagodes* (1903), mm. 92-98



### ***Biblical Exoticism in Debussy***

Biblical exoticism became an important strand of the French exotic tradition with Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*, which portrays the ancient Biblical world with a highly Orientalized musical language (as we have seen above). Massenet's *Hérodiade* is another example of French Biblical Orientalism, for it makes liberal use of exotic signifiers in its depiction of the Biblical tale of Herod and Salome. Debussy contributed to the genre of French Biblical Orientalism with his incidental music for D'Annunzio's play *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien* (1913), in which exotic markers permeate Debussy's score and shape its musical language.

The play portrays the life of Saint Sebastian, a devout Christian living in Rome at a time when paganism was the official, dominant religion. Commanded by the pagan authorities—especially the Roman emperor Diocletian—to renounce Christianity in favor of paganism, Sebastian steadfastly refuses to disavow his religious beliefs. He is thus put to death for his refusal to worship the pagan Gods. The play concludes with Sebastian's triumphant ascent to Heaven, surrounded by angels who praise him for his unshakeable Christian faith. The work is therefore based on a conflict between Christianity and paganism, in which Christianity is portrayed as the path to salvation.

In Act II, however, long before his ascent to Heaven, Sebastian undergoes a series of mystical, otherworldly experiences, many of which involve pagan figures. Taking place in a sorcerers' chamber, this act features such characters as Mesopotamian sorceresses, Babylonian astrologers, and the virgin Erigone, a mythological figure sometimes linked with the astrological sign Virgo. Erigone's

song is pastoral and gentle in character; she sings “I scythed the wheat stalks, leaving behind the yellow lilies; my soul, under the mild sky, was the swallow’s sister; my shadow seemed to be a wing, which I followed in the harvest; and I was the virgin, true to my shadow and my song.”<sup>175</sup> This text emphasizes Erigone’s idyllic, harmonious relationship with nature. She likens her soul to the swallow, and her shadow to a wing, hence comparing herself to a bird and linking her identity with the natural world. In addition to portraying herself as a pastoral, bird-like creature, Erigone also portrays herself as faithful and virtuous, when she sings that she has been true to her shadow and her song. Therefore, the text draws an implicit parallel between her and Sebastian, who is also noteworthy for his fidelity: he remains true unto death to his chosen religion.

Erigone is, therefore, portrayed as a pastoral, innocent creature; virginal and pure, she sings of her fidelity and her virtue. She is also, in a sense, exotic by virtue of being a pagan figure; hence, she is other to the Judeo-Christian tradition of the West. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Erigone’s song is pentatonic, reflecting her exoticism and her innocence. As we have seen, composers often use pentatonicism to signify a pastoral, innocent type of exoticism, and Debussy draws on this tradition in Erigone’s music. Her song begins with a 3-measure pentatonic introduction, based on the E-pentatonic scale (the E-major scale with the fourth and seventh omitted). Erigone’s opening phrase, beginning in m. 4, grows out of the music presented in the introductory measures, closely resembling the melodic

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<sup>175</sup> Translation my own.

material set forth by solo winds in mm. 1-3 (ex. 35, mm. 1-6). This close

The image shows a musical score for Example 35, Claude Debussy's *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien* (1911), measures 1-6. The score is in 8/8 time, key of D major (two sharps). It features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Andantino' and the dynamics are 'pp doux et souple'. The vocal line is titled 'LA VOIX DE LA VIERGE ERIGONE' and the lyrics are 'Je fau - chais l'E - pi de fro - ment, ou - bli - eu - se de l'as - pho -'. The piano accompaniment consists of arpeggiated chords in the right hand and sustained chords in the left hand.

Example 35. Claude Debussy, *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien* (1911), mm. 1-6

relationship between vocal line and orchestral material, which continues throughout most of the song, perhaps mirrors her harmonious, symbiotic relationship with nature. Locke attributes this relationship to the possible influence of the gamelan: “The solo winds imitate the vocal line much as performers in a gamelan echo each other.”<sup>176</sup> Locke says little else about this song, although he acknowledges that more needs to be said: “This remarkable song deserves to be examined as comprehensively as his much better-known exploration of pentatonic-drenched gamelan style ‘Pagodes.’”<sup>177</sup> In what follows, I respond to Locke’s call for further

<sup>176</sup> Ralph P. Locke, “Unacknowledged Exoticism in Debussy: The Incidental Music for *Le Martyre de saint Sébastien*,” *The Music Quarterly* (Nov. 2008), 395.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

analysis, focusing mainly on the musical and cultural work performed by pentatonicism in this song.

Erigone's vocal melody remains pentatonic throughout much of the song, in spite of some fleeting chromatic inflections. A brief chromatic inflection occurs in m. 12, producing an augmented second in the vocal line—perhaps a further musical reminder of Erigone's exoticism. Another chromatic passing tone occurs in m. 17, on the word *Shadow*, creating a momentary, shadow-like, darkening of the music (ex. 36, mm. 13-18). But these chromatic tones function as passing tones within a pentatonic framework.

The image shows a musical score for Claude Debussy's *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien* (1911), measures 13-18. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is pentatonic, with a brief chromatic inflection in measure 12. The piano accompaniment is also pentatonic, with a brief chromatic inflection in measure 17. The lyrics are: "sœur de l'hi - ron - del - le; Mon om - bre mé - tait pres - qu'une".

Example 36. Claude Debussy, *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien* (1911), mm. 13-18

The song ends with an instrumental postlude that takes place after Erigone has finished singing. Significantly, this postlude shifts from the pentatonic scale to a whole-tone collection, suggesting that pentatonicism is linked specifically with Erigone's voice. When she stops singing, the music ceases to be pentatonic.

Several other features of this song enhance the pastoral innocence projected by the pentatonic melody. For instance, as Locke points out, "often her notes move in a simple, even rhythm, like a nursery rhyme, thereby suggesting her innocent nature."<sup>178</sup> Even more significant is the fact that Erigone's song is to be sung offstage: Erigone's voice is disembodied. She is not physically present on stage. Indeed, her vocal line is indicated in the score as "la voix de la vierge Erigone," "the voice of the virgin Erigone," thereby emphasizing that it is her *voice*, and not her body, that Sebastian encounters in the sorcery chamber. The disembodiment of her voice underscores her virginal innocence: she is pure soul, bodyless, transcendentally asexual. Innocent of the sins of the flesh, she seems to *have* no flesh: her voice floats through the theater as if unanchored to a body.

Indeed, disembodied voices, across a wide variety of media (opera, plays, films, etc), often connote transcendence. The film theorist Kaja Silverman observes that "There is a general theoretical consensus that the theological status of the disembodied voice-over is the effect of maintaining its source in a place apart from the camera, inaccessible to the gaze of either the cinematic apparatus or the viewing subject....In other words, the voice-over is privileged to the degree that *it transcends the body*." Erigone's disembodied voice-over possesses a high degree

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

of transcendence, as a result of the pentatonic character of her melody. Day-O'Connell notes that pentatonicism is often linked with transcendence and spirituality: "I wish to argue that spirituality in some sense resides 'in' the pentatonic scale," he writes, explaining that "the very absence of the leading tone...may...be understood as a musical metaphor for the divine."<sup>179</sup> Pentatonicism thus enhances the spiritual, ethereal effect of Erigone's song. In brief, the text, the pentatonicism and the vocal disembodiment all work together to project an image of Erigone as transcendent and pure.

Hence, Erigone is presented in a positive manner. She is an admirable character, embodying positive traits such as transcendence, purity and fidelity. Indeed, her transcendent, virginal purity seems to align her with the Christian figure of the Virgin Mary. In fact, later in the same act, the Virgin Mary herself makes an appearance. Erigone would seem to be a proto-Christian figure, nominally pagan but possessing qualities associated with Christianity. Recall that *Le Martyre* establishes an opposition between Christianity and paganism, in which Christianity is presented as superior and paganism is portrayed as bad (or at least misguided). But Erigone is a pagan figure who shares many features with the Christians. Her presence in the play hence complicates the polar opposition between Christianity and paganism. That is, her appearance in the play momentarily challenges a black-and-white division between Us and Them, Christians and pagans. At least that is what the *text* does, through its description of her "Christian-like" fidelity and purity.

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<sup>179</sup> Day-O'Connell, *Pentatonicism*, 127-29.

Does Debussy's music tell a different story, or does it reinforce the textual portrayal of Erigone as a "Christian" pagan? Specifically, what is the effect of pentatonicism in her song? Does it enhance the image of Erigone as innocent and virtuous (hence Christian)? Or does it serve to exoticize her, emphasizing her otherness, reminding us that she is one of them (the pagans) and not one of us? Or does it do both—does it both Christianize and paganize her? I would argue that Debussy exploits the ambiguity of pentatonicism in her song. That is, pentatonicism is a trope with multiple meanings: depending on the context, it can signify either exoticism *or* religious (usually Christian) transcendence. As Day-O'Connell has observed, "Just as pentatonicism may signify the distant realms of the pastoral and the exotic, so too may it signify that furthestmost realm: the spiritual."<sup>180</sup> This song activates all of these meanings. Her pentatonic music signifies pagan otherness and Christian selfhood. Hence, her music perfectly suits her dual identity as pagan *and* Christian.

***Evoking Ancient Greece:  
Debussy Adds to the French Exotic Tradition***

In this chapter, we have seen that French composers evoked a wide array of distant lands—Egypt, India, Japan, and Ceylon, among many others—and even some not-so-distant lands, such as Spain. In other words, French composers were fascinated with any and all exotic locales, near and far. Debussy not only participated in this French tradition of evoking exotic lands, he also contributed to

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 102.

this tradition by adding a new locale to the list of places that served as objects of French exoticization: he added ancient Greece, which had not been a prominent part of the French exotic tradition before Debussy. To be sure, Greece “had long been considered half-Eastern, akin in certain ways to the polytheistic cultures of ancient Mesopotamia and to the (more recent) Middle East.”<sup>181</sup>

But, before Debussy, Greece was not the focus of any exotic musical portrayals. Debussy put Greece on the map as a target of musical exoticism. The first—and the most famous—Greek-themed work of Debussy’s is his celebrated *Prélude à l’Après-midi d’un Faune*. This work portrays the mythological world of ancient Greece, populated by nymphs and fauns. As I hope to show, Debussy depicts the archaic timelessness of this world with static harmonies and exotic orchestral effects.

*Faune* has received an enormous amount of scholarly attention, in part because of its unusual approach to form and repetition. Matthew Brown and James Hepokoski, for instance, analyze the ways in which *Faune* adheres to certain 19<sup>th</sup>-century tonal conventions while undermining others.<sup>182</sup> Jessica Wiskus looks at the role of repetition in *Faune* in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century French philosopher Merleau-Ponty. She argues that the repeated melodic figures in *Faune* invite the listener to ponder the philosophy of time and memory: “In the *Prelude*, we begin to hear Merleau-Ponty’s sense of mythical time....The flute arabesque is woven throughout the whole of the piece....The expressive sense of repetition confirms the

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<sup>181</sup> Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 218.

<sup>182</sup> Matthew Brown, “Tonality and Form in Debussy’s *Prélude à l’Après-midi d’un faune*,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 15 (1993), 131. James Hepokoski, “Formulaic Openings in Debussy,” *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 8:1 (Summer 1984): 56.



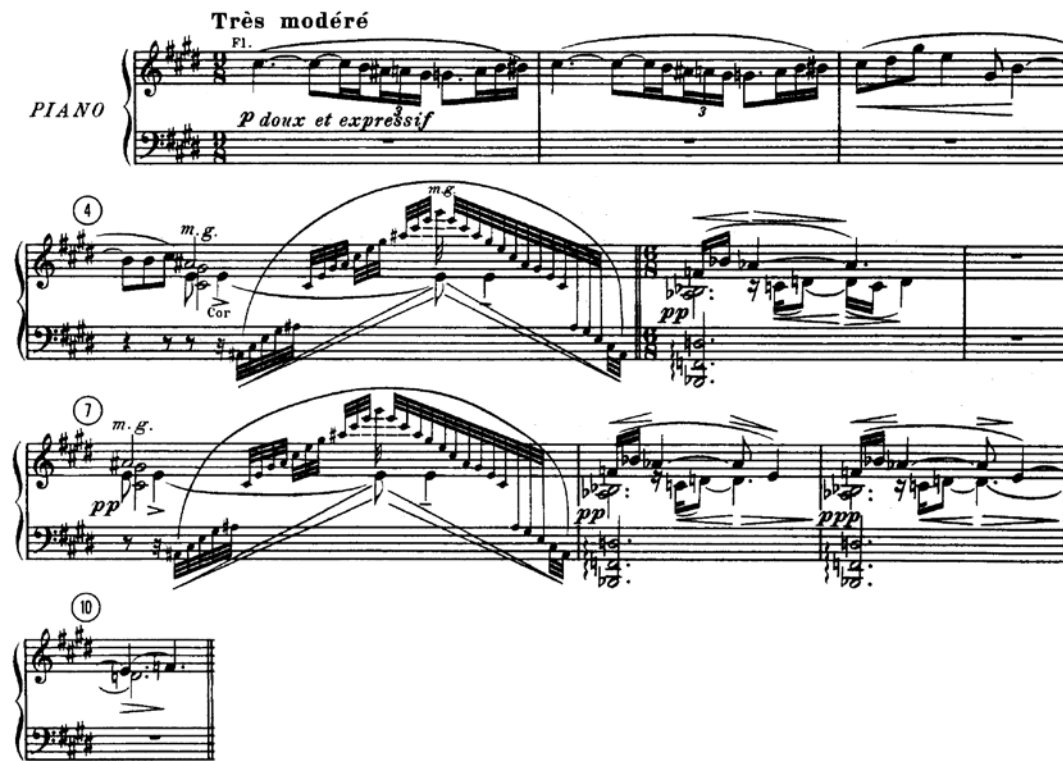
depths that the piece has traversed.”<sup>183</sup> I believe that this sense of repetition has another important function: it links *Faune* to a large repertoire of French exotic pieces, all of which share a common set of features, including repeated (static) musical figures. I hope that my analysis of exoticism in *Faune* will shed new light on this much-studied work. My goal is to point out Debussy’s use of a French exotic code, a component of *Faune*’s musical language that has thus far gone unnoticed.

We have seen, in the previous chapter, that 19<sup>th</sup>-century French composers often suspended functional harmony to create an exotic effect. In keeping with this tradition, *Faune* allows elusive gestures to take precedence over goal-oriented functional harmony. Thus, Debussy creates a static sound-world, in which harmonies melt into each other without direction or forward motion. Indeed, the work opens with a tonally amorphous flute melody (mm. 1-2); gliding up and down through the interval of a tritone, this unaccompanied melody initially establishes no tonal orientation (ex. 37, mm. 1-10). This melody is harmonized in many different ways throughout the rest of the work: its tonal ambiguity renders it susceptible to an almost infinite number of possible harmonizations. Mm. 3-4 of the unaccompanied melody are marked by a slight sharpening of tonal focus, as the melody outlines an E Major triad.

This moment of relative clarity proves, however, to be transient; the arrival of the a#7 chord in m. 4 casts yet another veil of uncertainty over the tonality. That is,

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<sup>183</sup> Jessica Wiskus, *The Rhythm of Thought: Art, Literature, and Music after Merleau-Ponty* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 51.



Example 37. Claude Debussy, *Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune* (1894), mm. 1-10

a#7 is an unusual chord within an ostensible E Major context. While it could presumably be parsed as vii7/V, Debussy does not allow it to behave as such. Instead of proceeding in goal-directed fashion to V, the a#7 chord in m. 4 is followed by a Bb7 chord in m. 5. As Matthew Brown notes, “Few passages in the standard repertory are more obscure than the opening of the *Prelude*.”<sup>184</sup> In discussing this obscure opening, Hepokoski aptly describes its musical language as one of “unclarified possibilities.”<sup>185</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Matthew Brown, “Tonality and Form in Debussy’s *Prélude à l’Après-midi d’un faune*,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 15 (1993): 131.

But do any of these misty possibilities resolve into tonal clarity later in the work? Certainly not in mm. 11-14, in which the opening melody reappears over a D Major triad (ex. 38, mm. 11-20). To some extent, this triad functions as a lower neighbor to the E reached in m. 13; this E, however, is no sooner touched upon than it is left behind: mm. 14-20 return to the a#/Bb harmonic world of mm. 4-10. It is not until m. 21 that E begins to emerge as a functional tonic (ex. 39, mm. 21-30); the formerly ambiguous note a# now begins to assume a more functional role, appearing as the third of V9/V in m. 28, and leading to a cadence in the dominant of E, reached in m. 30.

What we have seen so far in this piece, then, is a nonfunctional opening pair of phrases (mm. 1-10 and 11-20) whose tonally ambiguous elements are, to some extent, clarified in the third phrase (mm. 21-30). To some extent, then, the first two phrases furnish the material that eventually serves as the basis of a harmonically functional progression. But the first two phrases are, nevertheless, comprised largely of non-functional harmony, even though some of the harmonies are later reinterpreted in a more functional context. The non-functional, non-directed harmonies imbue the music with an air of timelessness, archaism, and exoticism. The orchestral effects, understated yet colorful, add to the exotic tone of this work,

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<sup>185</sup> James Hepokoski, "Formulaic Openings in Debussy," *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 8:1 (Summer 1984): 56.

Fl.  
pp

13

15 *expressif*

18 *Retenu*  
*dim.*

- scen - do

Example 38. Claude Debussy, *Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune* (1894), mm. 11-20



Example 39. Claude Debussy, *Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune* (1894), mm. 21-30

particularly the passages in which flute and harp play together (this combination, as we have previously noted, has a strong exotic valence).

Debussy's *La Flûte de Pan* (1895-98) demonstrates his continuing interest in Greece as an exotic locale. This song is the first of Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*, a cycle of three songs based on Pierre Louys' 1894 set of poems entitled *Chansons de Bilitis*. Louys' poems describe a series of erotic encounters in the life

of the fictional Greek courtesan Bilitis. In *La Flûte de Pan*, Bilitis—at this point in the cycle still a young virgin—has an erotically charged experience with the shepherd Lykas, in which the syrinx (a Greek wind instrument) takes on a distinctly erotic connotation.<sup>186</sup> The text of the song is as follows:

For the day of Hyacinth, he gave me a syrinx made of carefully cut reeds united with white wax that is sweet as honey to my lips. He is teaching me to play, seated on his lap, but I am trembling a little. He plays after me, so softly that I can hardly hear him. We have nothing to say to each other, so near we are, one to the other; but our songs want to answer each other, and taking turns our lips unite over the flute. It is late. Now comes the song of the green frogs that begins with the night. My mother will never believe that I have stayed so long searching for my lost sash.<sup>187</sup>

Debussy's setting of this text has a pronounced modal flavor. The first measure presents a scalar figure, based on the B Lydian mode. This run, as Rumph has observed, "imitates the syrinx, portraying the vigorous sweep of the traditional seven reeds across the mouth."<sup>188</sup> The syrinx-motive occurs several times throughout the course of the song, appearing in m. 1, 4, 13, and 28, always in B Lydian (ex. 40, mm. 1-4). The modal flavor of this song is not, however, limited to the syrinx motive: it pervades many other sections as well. For instance, in m. 2 Debussy uses the major supertonic, which has a Lydian flavor, as a sort of plagal chord leading to a tonic cadence. When the vocal melody enters in m. 3, it too is Lydian; the music remains in B Lydian until mm. 11-12, at which point it makes a

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<sup>186</sup> This instrument intrigued Debussy so much that he actually wrote a solo flute piece called *Syrinx* in 1913.

<sup>187</sup> This translation is taken from William Gibbons' article, "Debussy as Storyteller: Narrative Expansion in the *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*," *Current Musicology* 85 (Spring 2008): 13.

<sup>188</sup> Stephen Rumph, "Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*: Song, Opera, and the Death of the Subject," *Journal of Musicology* 12 (Fall 1994): 468.

CHANT *Lent et sans rigueur de rythme*

PIANO *pp*

*Doux et soutenu*  
*p*  
 Pour le jour des Hy-a . cin . thies, — il m'a don\_né u\_ne sy\_

Example 40. Claude Debussy, *La Flûte de Pan* (1897-1898), mm. 1-4

brief detour through a Lydian-inflected G Major, before returning in m. 13 to the B-Lydian syrinx motive (ex. 41, mm. 11-14). Significantly, the piece also closes in B Lydian, with a varied reprise of the opening syrinx motive, confirming B Lydian as the central mode on which this song is based (ex. 42, mm. 27-30).

pei - ne. Nous n'avons  
*pp Rit. a Tempo 1°*  
rien à nous di - re, tant nous sommes près l'un de l'au - tre; mais nos chan.  
*p*

Example 41. Claude Debussy, *La Flûte de Pan* (1897-1898), mm. 11-14

-du - e.  
*a Tempo*  
*Très lointain*  
*pp*  
*Très retenu*  
*ppp*

Example 42. Claude Debussy, *La Flûte de Pan* (1897-1898), mm. 27-30



*Debussy's Sirènes:  
Exoticism and Wordless Singing*

In 1899, Debussy composed yet another exotic evocation of Greece: *Sirènes*, the third in his set of orchestral nocturnes. As we have seen, French composers often use lushly sensuous music to portray the exotic other as feminine, irrational, pagan, and dangerously seductive. In keeping with this French tradition, Debussy's orchestral nocturne *Sirènes* portrays the alluring, exotic singing of the mythological sirens--women who lure sailors to their death with their seductive songs. Debussy's portrait of these dangerous creatures is replete with exotic tropes, underscoring the link between the exotic, the erotic, and the feminine. Throughout much of the work, Debussy makes heavy use of wordless female singing—a familiar trope in French exotic music, and one which we have already encountered in several works, including Berlioz' *Les Troyens*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Delibes' *Lakmé*, and Massenet's *Thaïs*. Debussy's use of this trope in *Sirènes* depicts, as Rebecca Leydon observes, “a remote, mythic time and place; the wordless voice intimates a pre-rational ancient past.”<sup>189</sup>

The vocal writing in *Sirènes* remains within a narrow melodic range; in fact, the voices often oscillate hypnotically between two adjacent pitches (ex. 43, mm. 26-27). The static, ostinato-like character of the vocal melody intensifies the exotic effect of the wordless vocals. Further adding to the exotic effect are the ostinato figures in the instrumental parts, imbuing the music with a sense of temporal suspension. Richard Parks astutely observes that *Sirènes* “has no real

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<sup>189</sup> Rebecca Leydon, *Widening the Horizon: Exoticism in Post-war Popular Music* (Sydney: John Libbey & Company, 1999), 52.

FL.  
*pp*

COR.

SOP. *p très expressif*

MEZZO-SOP.

*pp très léger*

*pp très léger*

*pp très léger*

*pp très léger*

*pp très léger*

*pizz.*  
*pp très léger*

E. 1217 F

Example 43. Claude Debussy, *Sirènes* (1897-99), mm. 26-27

melody or theme. It consists, rather, of a series of superimposed layers of reiterated rhythmic patterns, and sonorities assigned to various combinations of instruments and female voices.”<sup>190</sup> In the above example, for instance, layers of ostinato-like patterns combine to form a static portrait of the exotic sirens: the violins repeat a decorative figure several times, while the lower strings reiterate an ostinato pattern based on the tonic triad; the horns repeat a simple motive, based on a descending fourth, while the flutes remain rooted to the tonic triad. Even the singers are drawn into this temporal stasis. They undulate back and forth between the same two notes for several beats.

Like many exotic works, *Sirènes* is heavily modal; Debussy’s use of E-sharp in the key of B Major creates a pronounced Lydian inflection. Indeed, the singers oscillate between the third and the sharp fourth scale degree, emphasizing the Lydian mode through their emphasis on E-sharp. A few A-naturals occur in the violins. These enhance the archaic, modal effect through the use of the pseudo-antique lowered seventh scale degree.

### *Debussy’s Spanish Music*

Debussy composed numerous works in a (pseudo-)Spanish style. In the introduction to this chapter, we briefly examined his *Soirée dans Grenade*, which gave us a taste of his richly evocative music in the Spanish vein. Besides *Soirée*, his other “Spanish” works include *Lindaraja* (1901), *La Sérénade Interrompue* (1909-1910), *Iberia* (1909), and *La Puerta del Vino* (1913). I will not address those

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<sup>190</sup> Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy*, 248.

works in this chapter; I will discuss them in a later chapter, in the context of my examination of Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner* and its influence on Debussy. Suffice it to say at this point that Debussy's Spanish works comprise a significant portion of his musical output and reflect his intense interest in musical exoticism.

***Debussy's Exoticism:  
The Reception in the French Press***

Debussy's contemporaries perceived his music as deeply exotic, in a deeply French way. That is, his contemporaries sensed that his music engaged, in profound and inventive ways, with the French tradition of exoticism. Daniel Chennevière, writing in 1913, observed that Debussy's Orientalism enabled him to give musical voice to the French soul: "He [Debussy] regenerated music; he impregnated it with the youth of the Orient....He sang our French soul."<sup>191</sup> Chennevière is here positing a link between Debussy's Orientalism and his Frenchness.

Many music critics of the time recognized that Debussy's use of exotic markers derived not from the music of actual exotic Others, but rather from a French vocabulary of exoticism. In an article entitled "Debussy Exotique?", Leon Vallas observes that Debussy's music, although replete with evocations of exoticism, is thoroughly French: "Debussy manifested a preference, completely natural, for the music of his country, a friendly brotherhood with his musical compatriots. A very lively national spirit animates his chronicles, a true

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<sup>191</sup> "Il a régénéré la musique; il l'a imprégnée de la jeunesse d'Orient....Il a chanté notre âme française." Daniel Chennevière, *Claude Debussy et Son Oeuvre* (Paris: Durand et Compagnie, 1913), 45.

nationalism, both instinctive and rational, whose expression renews itself ceaselessly in very diverse, but always ardent, forms.”<sup>192</sup> In a subsequent article, written the following month, Vallas further develops his argument regarding Debussy’s musical Frenchness, pointing out that Debussy’s Spanish-style evocations are more French than Spanish: “He did not want to write Spanish music; rather, he sought to translate into music the impressions that Spain evoked in him. The translation is successful in a most admirable way. In his diverse works, Debussy does not make use of popular Spanish songs.”<sup>193</sup> Vallas is implying that Debussy translated his impressions of Spain into a French musical language, a claim with which I agree completely. Pianist Alfred Cortot makes a similar point when he suggests that Debussy’s exotic works are written from a Western point of view: “*Soirée dans Grenade* is not satisfied to evoke only the nights of Spain and their undeniable enchantments, guitars, and castanets, but we also sense here the voluptuous trembling of a Western soul...”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> “Debussy manifeste une préférence, toute naturelle, pour la musique de son pays, une fraternelle amitié pour ses compatriotes musiciens. Un esprit national très vivace anime ses chroniques, un vrai nationalisme, à la fois instinctif et raisonné, dont l’expression se renouvelle sans cesse sous des formes très diverses, mais toujours ardentes.” Leon Vallas, “Debussy Exotique?” *Nouvelle Revue Musicale* 23 (Nov 1924): 10.

<sup>193</sup> “Il voulut non pas faire de la musique espagnole, mais traduire en musique les impressions que l’Espagne éveillait en lui. Traduction réussie de la façon la plus admirable. Dans ces divers ouvrages, Debussy ne fait pas usage de thèmes populaires espagnols.” Leon Vallas, “Debussy et L’Espagne,” *Nouvelle Revue Musicale* 23 (Dec 1924): 42.

<sup>194</sup> “*Soirée dans Grenade* ne se satisfait point davantage d’évoquer uniquement les nuits d’Espagne et leurs enchantements convenus, guitars et castagnettes, mais nous y sentirons frémir de volupté une âme occidentale...” Alfred Cortot, “La Musique pour Piano de Claude Debussy,” *La Revue Musicale* (Dec 1920): 134.

***Debussy's Exoticism:  
Russian, Indonesian, or French?***

Some scholars have suggested that the exotic features in Debussy's music derive from the influence of Russian music. Lockspieser sums up this argument as follows: "The Russian influence in France was many-sided, and frequent attempts have been made to identify the features of one Russian composer or another in Debussy's work. In the end they seldom offer more than personal views. These are of course valuable, but imprecise. On the technical plane, in regard to harmony or the use of the pentatonic scale, it is impossible to define this influence with certainty."<sup>195</sup> Mark DeVoto is one of the scholars who seek to demonstrate that Debussy was influenced by Russian music: "We may look to the future for comprehensive studies of the evolution of Debussy's harmonic language, from the earliest works in which he is influenced most by Chopin, Tchaikovsky, and his own French contemporaries, to the middle works in which Wagner, Fauré, and the Russian Five loom large."<sup>196</sup>

In a recent anthology, *Rethinking Debussy*, Roy Howat argues that many of Debussy's stylistic features are influenced by 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian music, especially that of Tchaikovsky, Balakirev, and Borodin. Howat points out Debussy's use of descending chromatic lines and bass drones in the Nocturne. He shows that Tchaikovsky uses similar gestures in the second movement of his Sixth

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<sup>195</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, Vol. 1, 1862-1902 (London: Cassell, 1962), 53.

<sup>196</sup> Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality* 124.

Symphony.<sup>197</sup> He also claims a Russian origin for the long-held pedal points in Debussy's "Fetes," tracing this static texture to works by Balakirev.<sup>198</sup>

But one need not look to Russia to find examples of these features. Many of the features that Howat identifies as Russian, such as descending chromatic lines and bass drones, are also found in 19<sup>th</sup>-century French exotic music, as we have discovered in our examination of works by Massenet, Bizet, Delibes, and others. For instance, the Habanera from Bizet's *Carmen* is replete with descending chromatic figures and static bass lines, as I have shown in Chapter One.

Since 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian music and French exotic music share so many features, how do we know whether Debussy's use of these features derives from Russian or French music? Of course, it is impossible to know for sure. But, in light of Debussy's nationalistic political views, it is likely that his use of these features is more indebted to French music. Moreover, the locales evoked in Debussy's exotic music offer compelling evidence of his engagement with a specifically French brand of exoticism. As we have seen, many of his exotically themed works evoke Spain and Egypt.

Spain and Egypt were favored locales in French exotic music. Indeed, many French exotic operas (and even instrumental works) represent Spain and Egypt. For instance, Bizet's *Carmen*, Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*, Chabrier's *España* and Saint-Saëns' *Havanaise* exemplify French composers' obsession with evoking

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<sup>197</sup> Roy Howat, "Russian Imprints in Debussy's Piano Music," in *Rethinking Debussy*, ed. Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheeldon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

Spain musically.<sup>199</sup> David's *Désert*, Massenet's *Thaïs*, Berlioz' *Enfance du Christ* and Saint-Saëns' *Piano Concerto No. 5*, all of which evoke Egypt, indicate Egypt's prominent role in the French exotic tradition. French composers' interest in Egyptian-themed music may stem in part from French colonial ambitions in Egypt. Debussy often draws on this French tradition of interest in Egypt and Spain, evoking Spain in numerous works (listed above) and evoking Egypt in *Khamma*, *Pour L'Égyptienne*, and *Canope*.

The locales favored in Russian exotic works are quite different. Russian composers had little interest in evoking Spain or Egypt; they were drawn primarily to exotic locales in Central Asia or Persia, motivated by geographical proximity to compose musical portraits of their "Oriental" neighbors.<sup>200</sup> Much Russian exoticism centers on Central Asia, a large swath of land that includes countries such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan. For instance, Russian composer Borodin wrote an orchestral work entitled *On the Steppes of Central Asia* (1880), and Balakirev composed *Georgian Song* (1865).

Borodin's opera *Prince Igor* (1887) also contains a strong Central Asian element, for many of its main characters are Polovtsians, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century nomadic tribe that lived in what is currently called Central Asia. Russian composers were also highly interested in Persia, a country separated from Russia only by the

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<sup>199</sup> Russian composers were somewhat interested in Spain as well. Rimsky-Korsakov, for example, wrote *Capriccio on Spanish Themes* in 1887. Balakirev and Glinka also wrote some Spanish-themed pieces.

<sup>200</sup> For a nuanced examination of Russian composers' interest in their exotic neighbors, see Richard Taruskin, "Entoiling the Falconet," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4:3 (Nov. 1992), 253-280. Taruskin astutely observed that Russians both identified with, and yet wished to distance themselves from, the "Oriental" countries bordering Russia on the South and East.



Caspian Sea. For instance, Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1820) features a number entitled "Persian chorus," and Musorgsky's opera *Khovanshchina* (1880) includes a Persian Dance, illustrating Russian composers' interest in that locale. Thus, Persia and Central Asia are strongly tied to Russian exoticism; the absence of these locales in Debussy's music indicates his lack of engagement with the Russian brand of exoticism. His locales are the "French" ones (Egypt and Spain) not the "Russian" ones.

Thus, the locales evoked in Debussy's exotic music link his works to the French tradition, not to the Russian tradition. Further evidence of his lack of interest in Russian exoticism is found in an article by the music critic Louis Laloy. In the article, written in 1906 for the music periodical *S.I.M.*, Laloy asserts that "The music of Debussy, even in the exoticism of *Pagodes* or *Soirée a Grenade*, always comes from the soul; that is to say, it reflects his personal style and feelings. The Russians focus far too often on the exterior surface, and they content themselves with mediocre and banal ideas."<sup>201</sup> Laloy makes it clear that, to his ear, Debussy's exotic works have nothing in common with Russian music, which Laloy disdainfully describes as superficial and banal. Laloy asserts that Debussy's exoticism is more internalized, and more deeply felt, than the Russian brand of exoticism. Thus, according to Laloy, Debussy was not influenced by Russian music.

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<sup>201</sup> "La musique de Debussy, même en l'exotisme des *Pagodes* ou de la *Soirée a* (sic) *Grenade*, va toujours jusqu'à l'âme: je veux dire qu'elle affirme une manière personnelle de sentir. Les Russes s'en tiennent trop souvent à l'éclat extérieur, et se contentent d'idées médiocres ou banales." Louis Laloy, "Les Concerts," *S.I.M.* Vol. 2 (1906), 212.

A few years later, Laloy returned to the issue of Debussy and Russian music, revisiting this topic in his book on Debussy. He writes: “There are, to be sure, certain resemblances between *Pélleas et Mélisande* and *Boris Godounov*...One could also believe that Moussorgski had encouraged Debussy to search for a more natural melodic style. But they [Debussy’s works] do not take anything from his [Mussorgsky’s] style.”<sup>202</sup>

Along similar lines, a 1908 article in *La Revue Musicale* argues that Debussy was influenced by French music, not Russian music: “It is not from the Russian musicians that Debussy borrowed his musical system (?); Debussy’s true precursor is the Frenchman Emmanuel Chabrier.”<sup>203</sup> By citing Chabrier as a formative influence on Debussy, the article underscores Debussy’s nationalistic attachment to French musical styles—and to French exoticism, for Chabrier wrote many exotic pieces. As we have seen, Chabrier drew on a French style of Spanish exoticism in works such as *España* and *Habanera*.

Invested in French musical traditions, Debussy himself made it clear, in his prose writings, that he believed Russian music had very little to offer to French musicians. Debussy asserted that the Russian school has “become as un-Russian as could be. Stravinsky himself is inclining dangerously toward Schoenberg’s side”<sup>204</sup> and he implied that other Russian composers, too, were forsaking native traditions

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<sup>202</sup> “Il en est de même pour certaines ressemblances entre *Pélleas et Mélisande* et *Boris Godounov*...On peut croire aussi que Moussorgski a encouragé Debussy à chercher un chant plus vrai. Mais ils s’y prennent chacun à sa manière.” Louis Laloy, *Claude Debussy*, Paris: Les Bibliophiles Fantaisistes, 1909, 50-51.

<sup>203</sup> “Ce n’est pas aux musiciens russes que Debussy a emprunté son système musical; le vrai précurseur de Debussy, c’est le français Emmanuel Chabrier.” *La Revue Musicale* 8:13 (15 Juillet 1908), 375.

<sup>204</sup> Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 306.

in favor of Germanic influence. As Jane Fulcher points out, Debussy “speaks of the young Russian school as far too German.”<sup>205</sup> The Germanic orientation of the Russian school troubled Debussy, for he was worried that “Stravinsky would help to further, and perhaps to bring this decidedly pernicious Germanic influence directly into France.”<sup>206</sup> As an avid nationalist who was invested in maintaining the purity of French music, Debussy perceived Russo-German influence as antithetical to his patriotic aesthetics.

In attempting to identify the sources of Debussy’s exoticism, scholars point not only to Russian music, but sometimes to Indonesian gamelan music. I believe, however, that he was not significantly influenced by actual non-Western musical traditions; instead, what he drew on was a *French* set of markers that evoked the non-Western world. That is, he draws upon an exotic vocabulary developed by his French predecessors. To be sure, he was deeply impressed with the gamelan music that he heard at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, as illustrated by his glowing description of gamelan music in a letter to Pierre Louys: “Javanese music is based on a type of counterpoint by comparison with which that of Palestrina is child’s play. And if we listen without European prejudice to the charm of their percussion, we must confess that our percussion is like primitive noises at a country fair.”<sup>207</sup> This letter makes it clear that he admired gamelan music enormously, and was enamored of its complexity and contrapuntal layering effects. But, despite Debussy’s evident fascination with gamelan music, I believe that he was not

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<sup>205</sup> Jane Fulcher, “Speaking the Truth to Power,” *Debussy and his World*, ed. Jane Fulcher (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 212.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>207</sup> Quoted in Mervyn Cooke, “The East in the West,” *The Exotic in Western Music*, 259.

significantly influenced by it. As I have shown in this chapter, the exotic features in Debussy's music—modality, stasis, pentatonicism, descending chromatic lines, augmented seconds, and so on—are all traceable to the influence of French exotic operas, which use all the same features that appear in Debussy's exotic works.

Richard Mueller observes that “Debussy interpreted Javanese music as a Western composer. He unconsciously chose those elements to which he could relate. The influence of Javanese music on this work, then, amounted to compositional emphasis placed on elements that seem, to us, to coexist in both music systems.”<sup>208</sup> I agree with Mueller that Debussy chose those elements of gamelan music to which he could relate, but I would advance this claim even further: in my view, Debussy focused on elements of gamelan music that resembled the established French vocabulary of exotic signifiers. That is, he heard gamelan music within a very particular, and selective, context: the context of the French exotic signifiers, markers which were embedded in a strong national tradition and which provided the framework for Debussy's own interest in exoticism.

Annegret Fauser attempts to demonstrate that gamelan music offered the stimulus for Debussy's exotic musical style. But she admits the problems with this endeavor. Searching for signs of gamelan influence in Debussy's opera *Pélleas et Mélisande*, she writes, “Mélisande's theme first appears in a whole-tone context and later is chromatically clouded. Furthermore, as Richard Langham Smith has observed, in Act 1, Mélisande's theme tends to be associated with either flute or

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<sup>208</sup> Richard Mueller, “Javanese Influence on Debussy's *Fantaisie* and Beyond,” *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 10:2 (Fall 1986): 160.

oboe, and enters usually on Ab (G#). These are abstract indicators of alterity referring to the exotic world of the bedajas rather than representing specific quotations of Javanese music, but they are distinct enough to act as semiotic markers in order to signal Méliande's musical difference from the conspicuously Western (albeit modal) world of Golaud."<sup>209</sup>

But the "abstract indicators of alterity" cited by Fauser—altered scales, coloristic chromaticism, and prominent use of woodwind instruments—are all part of the standard lexicon of French exotic markers, as we have seen time and again throughout this chapter. Therefore, Debussy is not necessarily drawing on gamelan music when he uses what Fauser calls "abstract indicators of alterity." The indicators of alterity that appear in Debussy's music were (as I have shown) already present within the French vocabulary of exoticism.

In fact, Fauser herself seems to be gesturing toward this argument when she writes, "Debussy's appropriation of elements from the exotic performances to further the cause of French music is as much part of the colonial enterprise as what we habitually identify in works such as [Delibes' exotic opera] *Lakmé*."<sup>210</sup> Fauser is right, I believe, to point out the similarities between Debussy's and Delibes' exoticisms. But she does not take this comparison far enough. I would argue that Debussy and Delibes do not only share the same *ideology*. They also share the same *vocabulary* of exoticism. It is this latter similarity which Fauser, like many other scholars, overlooks in her analysis of Debussy's musical exoticism.

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<sup>209</sup> Fauser, *Musical Encounters*, 204.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

Thus, in my view, many of the exotic sounds in Debussy's music can be traced not to aspects of gamelan music, but to his French predecessors' evocations of exoticism. That is, Debussy relies heavily on the French vocabulary of exotic signifiers. Despite his admiration for gamelan music, he drew primarily on the tropes that were already available within the French tradition of musical exoticism. This is not to say that gamelan music made no impression on Debussy. His encounter with this music probably enhanced his interest in exoticism, and perhaps reinforced his desire to absorb French signifiers of exoticism into his musical style. But the primary impetus behind his use of exotic signifiers came not from abroad, but rather from a tradition much closer to home: the French tradition of exoticism.

### *Exoticism and Antiquity in Debussy*

In Chapter One, I examined the complex relationship between the French colonial enterprise and the French tradition of musical exoticism. I suggested that French composers often avoided a direct engagement with colonial themes. They preferred to focus on the ancient Orient, which became an idealized locus of pre-colonial purity. Debussy participated in this tradition. In many of his exotic works, temporal and geographical forms of exoticism are intermingled.

In one of his first overtly exotic works, *Prelude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894), Debussy links himself firmly to this French tradition of depicting exotic antiquity. Mallarmé's poem does not evoke modern Greece. It portrays *ancient* Greece through its description of mythological figures associated with Greek

paganism: fauns and nymphs. Debussy's interest in ancient Greek exoticism continued with *Flute de Pan* and *Sirènes*. He was also fascinated with ancient Egypt, as shown in his *Pour l'Égyptienne* and *Canope*. He participated in the French fascination with Biblical exoticism in his oratorio *Le Martyre de Saint-Sebastien*. In brief, most of his exotic works were also archaic.

As suggested in Chapter One, this archaizing tendency might reflect a desire to distance the exotic works from the colonial present. It also reflects a desire to return to a mythical exotic homeland, based on a Rousseauian nostalgia for a simpler time. Debussy's remark about the Egyptian shepherd, which I referenced earlier in this chapter, indicates this form of nostalgia. As discussed above, Debussy wrote, "My favorite music is those few notes an Egyptian shepherd plays on his flute: he is a part of the landscape around him, and he knows harmonies that aren't in our books."<sup>211</sup>

This sentence encapsulates many of the attitudes surrounding exoticism at the time: the view of the Orient as a source of mystical, pre-rational knowledge ("harmonies that aren't in our books"), the conflation of the exotic with the pastoral ("part of the landscape around him") and the search for alternatives to current European music ("my favorite music is those few notes an Egyptian shepherd plays"). Debussy's nostalgic longing for exoticism, however, was not mere romantic escapism. As I will argue in the next three chapters, he strategically deployed exotic markers as weapons against Wagner.

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<sup>211</sup> Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, 48.

### Chapter Three

#### *Méditerraniser La Musique*

In Chapter Two, we discovered that Debussy's exotic works are tied to a strong national tradition of exoticism. As I argued, his exotic music reflects his nationalistic desire to write in a French style, using a French vocabulary. In this chapter we shall probe the reasons why musical Frenchness was vitally important to Debussy, and why he chose exotic signifiers as the vehicle for expressing his nationalistic sentiments musically. We will ask: what is at stake in Debussy's evocations of exoticism? What did exotic signifiers mean to Debussy, and what is he trying to communicate via his use of these signifiers?

In order to interpret the meaning of exotic signifiers in Debussy's music, we must examine the long shadow that Wagner cast upon fin-de-siècle music, and the ways in which Debussy grappled with this shadow. Nietzsche is of crucial importance here. As I hope to demonstrate, his writings on Wagner offered Debussy a set of tools for engaging with, and challenging, Wagner's legacy. It is, as I will argue, through Nietzsche's influence that Debussy came to interpret exotic markers as emblems of anti-Wagnerian nationalism. In other words, Nietzsche enabled Debussy (and other French composers) to link the three strands that run through my dissertation: exoticism, nationalism, and anti-Wagnerism.

The background against which I will develop my argument is the anti-Wagnerian movement in France, a movement that was well underway when Nietzsche penned his influential critique of Wagner in 1888. French anti-



Wagnerism began in earnest when France suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Germany in 1870-71, which touched off waves of anti-German sentiment in France. At this time, French composers, motivated by patriotism, sought to promote the cause of French music. To this end, Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussine, in 1871, founded the Société Nationale, an institution dedicated to promoting French music. The Société Nationale organized and sponsored many concerts featuring works by French composers. Indeed, many prominent French composers were members of this society: Cesar Franck, Jules Massenet, Gabriel Fauré, Henri Duparc, and Vincent D'Indy. The motto of the society was "ars gallica," reflecting the society's nationalist emphasis on celebrating and furthering French music.<sup>212</sup>

In 1882, Henri Duparc, one of the initial members, wrote that, thanks to the Société, "French art, so long misunderstood, attained its rightful place in France, and our composers finally found an elite public to hear them, to understand them, and to applaud."<sup>213</sup> In keeping with this attempt to revalue French music, composers who worked under the auspices of the Société Nationale often cultivated a profound, sublime musical style. This style accorded with the by-laws of the Society, which state that "the goal of the Society is to further the production and the popularization of all serious musical works. To encourage and to bring to light, as much as is in its power, all musical endeavors, in whatever form they may take, on

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<sup>212</sup> Timothy Jones, "Nineteenth-Century Orchestral and Chamber Music," in *French Music Since Berlioz*, eds. Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter. (Ashgate Publishing Company: Burlington, 2006).

<sup>213</sup> Quoted in Michael Strasser, "ArsGallica: The Société Nationale de Musique and its Role in French Musical Life" (PhD diss. University of Illinois, 1998), 144. The original source is found in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Département de Musique, Rés. F994, 1882.

condition that they reveal elevated and artistic aspirations on the part of the author.”<sup>214</sup>

The desire to promote French music went hand-in-hand with a hatred of German music, especially Wagnerian opera. Anti-Wagnerism was a raging movement in post-1870 France, as Jane Fulcher, Anya Suschitzky, and many other scholars have pointed out.<sup>215</sup> This anti-Wagnerian movement, in which Debussy participated, was largely motivated by a nationalistic desire to rid French music of Germanic influence. Diatribes against Wagner abounded in the French press. For instance, the French novelist and music critic Edouard Dujardin wrote, “If Wagner seems to represent excellently the German spirit, one is constrained to avow that the German spirit represents all the destructive things which the French spirit truly must purge from the air as its mission.”<sup>216</sup> Such polemics, as Scott Messing has observed, were often accompanied by a strong dose of French nationalism. For instance, French composer Alfred Bruneau asserted that “The young French school, fortified, regenerated, more and more the vigilant keeper of the highest and most beautiful qualities of our race, will be shortly, if they aren’t already, the first of those who contribute to the glory of our new century.”<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 136-37.

<sup>215</sup> Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics & Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Anya Suschitzky, “Debussy’s Rameau: French Music and Its Others,” *The Musical Quarterly* 86.3 (Fall 2002): 398-448.

<sup>216</sup> Quoted in Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music*, 10. Dujardin was originally enamored of Wagnerian opera, but he eventually came to view Wagner as a pernicious influence on French music. The reasons for his change of heart will be explored later.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 11.

### *Anti-Wagnerism and the Neo-Baroque Revival*

Motivated in part by a nationalistic desire to counter Wagnerian influence, many late 19<sup>th</sup>-century French composers wrote neo-Baroque works. The titles of these works, as well as certain stylistic features, pay homage to 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century French music. For instance, the final movement of Saint-Saëns' Septet for trumpet, string quartet, and piano (1882) is entitled "Gavotte en final." To be sure, this title seems to gesture toward the Baroque era in general without specifying the *French* Baroque in particular. Some of its musical features, however, point specifically to the French Baroque. Messing observes that its melody strongly resembles that of the sonata Op. 1 no. 9 by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century French composer Jean Marie Leclair.<sup>218</sup> Other neo-Baroque works by French composers include Vincent D'Indy's *Suite in re dans le style ancien* (1886), Leo Delibes' *Six airs de danse dans le style ancien pour la scene du bal* (1882), Erik Satie's *Trois Sarabandes* (1887), Alberic Magnard's *Suite d'orchestre dans le style ancien* (1892), Ernest Chausson's *Pavane* (1896), and Cecile Chaminade's *Piece dans le style ancien* (1893).<sup>219</sup> The neo-Baroque revival continued into the twentieth century, with such well-known works as Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin* appearing in 1917.

Debussy was an eager participant in the neo-Baroque movement. His four-movement *Petite Suite* for piano duet (1888-89), contains neo-Baroque elements and titles. The second movement, *Cortège*, refers to a French Baroque ceremonial procession. Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque*, composed a year later, similarly uses

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

the names of Baroque dances in some of its movements. Its final movement, *Passepied*, features staccato passagework reminiscent of the plucking of a lute. The third movement of Debussy's *Pour Le Piano* (1894-1901), entitled *Sarabande*, similarly alludes to Baroque stylistic traits, evoking the solemn character and characteristic rhythmic patterns of the Baroque sarabande. In *Hommage à Rameau* (1905), which will be discussed in detail in the final chapter, he again alludes to the genre of the Sarabande, this time in the context of an even more explicit evocation of French Baroque music, as signaled by the title of the work.

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) became one of the central figures in the neo-Baroque revival. In 1895, a group of French composers, including D'Indy, Dukas, Debussy, and Saint-Saëns, began work on an 18-volume edition of Rameau's collected works.<sup>220</sup> The ambition and scope of this editorial project reflects the importance accorded to Rameau within late 19<sup>th</sup>-century French musical culture. The musical evocation of Rameau was a sub-genre of neo-Baroque music. In the same year (1905) that Debussy wrote his abovementioned *Hommage à Rameau*, Paul Dukas composed a series of variations on a theme by Rameau. It was during this period that Rameau's operas began to be re-edited and performed in France; for example, on February 2, 1903, his *Castor et Pollux* was performed at the Schola Cantorum under the direction of Vincent D'Indy;<sup>221</sup> later that year, on

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<sup>220</sup> Suschitzsky, "Debussy's Rameau," 414.

<sup>221</sup> François Lesure, ed. *Debussy on Music*, 110.

June 22, another work of his, *La Guirlande*, was also performed at the Schola Cantorum.<sup>222</sup>

Debussy was a key player in the French revival of Rameau. In his music criticism, he often touts Rameau as a symbol of French nationalism. In a vitriolic “letter” to the (already long dead) composer Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787), Debussy disdainfully “tells” Gluck, “Rameau was far more Greek than you! (Don’t get angry, I’ll be leaving you soon!) What’s more, Rameau was lyrical, and that suits the French spirit from all points of view. We should have continued this tradition of lyricism before, not waiting for a century to pass before we rediscovered it. From having known you, French music gained the unexpected benefit of falling straight into the arms of Wagner.”<sup>223</sup> In this “letter”, Debussy implies that French composers such as himself are attempting to free themselves from Wagnerian influence through rediscovering their national roots.

Many of Debussy’s references to Rameau contain implicit criticisms of German music, especially Wagnerian opera. For example, in his review of Rameau’s opera *Castor et Pollux*, Debussy writes, “We have, however, a purely French tradition in the works of Rameau. They combine a charming and delicate tenderness with precise tones and strict declamation in the recitatives—none of that affected German pomp, nor the need to emphasize everything with extravagance or out-of-breath explanations.”<sup>224</sup> He praises Rameau’s innate Frenchness and curses the pernicious influence of ‘foreign’ (read: German) music: “Now, the name of

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<sup>222</sup> Francois Lesure and Roger Nichols, eds. *Debussy Letters*, trans. Roger Nicholas (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 135.

<sup>223</sup> François Lesure, ed. *Debussy on Music*, 124-25.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Watteau shines with a halo of glory...in Rameau we have his perfect musical counterpart. Isn't it about time we accorded him that place which he alone has the right to fill, instead of obliging French music to turn toward heavy cosmopolitan traditions that inhibit the natural development of her genius?"<sup>225</sup> Along similar lines, Debussy wrote, in a letter to a young composer, "There's too much German influence in France and we're still suffocated by it. Don't you go the same way, don't let yourselves be taken in by false profundity and the detestable German 'modernsty'!"<sup>226</sup> As these passages demonstrate, Rameau was, for Debussy, a symbol of French nationalism, an emblem of anti-Wagnerism.

Rameau was often celebrated, by Debussy and his contemporaries, as embodying a particularly "French" brand of simplicity, lightness, and clarity. Vincent D'Indy, for example, wrote, "The [French] tradition can be represented by the great names of Charpentier, Couperin, and Rameau, Grétry, and so on...We desire completely, more or less consciously, to rest from too complex music, to return to simplicity."<sup>227</sup> One of Debussy's close friends, the musicologist Louis Laloy, was so enamored of Rameau that he wrote a book on the composer, in which he echoed the familiar trope of Rameau's clarity and simplicity. He writes that, in Rameau's music, "La melodie manifeste l'harmonie....la belle simplicité des accords qui la soutiennent demeure toujours apparente."<sup>228</sup> Debussy, too, praised Rameau's "French" clarity and elegance: French music is clarity, elegance, and

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>226</sup> Debussy *Letters*, trans. Roger Nicholas, 233.

<sup>227</sup> Quoted in Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music*, 11.

<sup>228</sup> "The melody gives rise to the harmony....the beautiful simplicity of the chords that support it always remains apparent." Louis Laloy, *Rameau* (Paris: Boulevard Saint-Germain, 1908), 190.

declamation both simple and natural. Couperin and Rameau are those who are truly French!”<sup>229</sup> “There’s too much German influence in France and we’re still suffocated by it. Don’t you go the same way, don’t let yourselves be taken in by false profundity and the detestable German ‘modernsty’!”<sup>230</sup> As D’Indy’s, Laloy’s, and Debussy’s writings demonstrate, Rameau was touted the epitome of “French” lightness, clarity, naturalness, and simplicity. This list of qualities, tendentiously claimed as “French,” was constructed in opposition to Wagner, whose music was criticized in France for its complexity, density, and “heavy” sound. Laloy neatly sums this up in a pithy sentence: “Romanticism is German, that is, complicated and metaphysical.”<sup>231</sup> Laloy, like many of his contemporaries, conflates romanticism, German music, and complexity, and metaphysics, lumping all these terms together into a single entity. This entity, according to many French musicians, should be avoided at all costs, in order to assert French national identity as distinct from German identity.

Indeed, many French writings on music are premised on an us-vs.-them dichotomy, in which German music is figured as complex, and French music is figured as the opposite. For instance, French music critic Lionel de La Laurencie casts France and Germany as opposites. In 1903, he wrote, “The Germans complicate by enlarging; we French simplify by condensing.”<sup>232</sup> Debussy participated enthusiastically in this us-vs.-them, German-vs.-French, discourse. In 1903, he wrote, “In Rameau’s oeuvre we find the pure French tradition: delicate and

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<sup>229</sup> Quoted in Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music*, 11.

<sup>230</sup> *Debussy Letters*, trans. Roger Nicholas, 233.

<sup>231</sup> Quoted in Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music*, 11.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

charming tenderness, correct accentuation and rigorous declamation in the recitatives, without that German affectation of profundity.”<sup>233</sup>

### ***Rameau as Figurehead***

Despite Debussy’s insistent claims of kinship with Rameau, scholars have not found compelling musical evidence of Rameau’s influence on Debussy. To be sure, Debussy’s prose writings articulate, almost obsessively, his desire to link himself to Rameau’s brand of musical Frenchness. Yet one looks in vain for musical signs of kinship between the two composers. Marianne Wheeldon observes that, in this respect, Debussy’s prose writings are at odds with his music: “While Debussy acknowledges, even emphasizes, the heritage of Rameau and Couperin, its musical effect in the sonatas is subtle and perhaps intangible.”<sup>234</sup> Messing similarly notes that Debussy’s musical works, even those bearing putatively “Baroque” titles, are indebted more to recent French music than to Rameau.<sup>235</sup> Jane Fulcher argues that, despite his avowed desire to emulate Rameau, Debussy found it impossible to be “doctrinaire” and was not interested in slavishly copying the styles of earlier music.<sup>236</sup> Michael Downes points out that Debussy strategically “used” Rameau as a weapon in his campaign against Wagnerian influence.<sup>237</sup> Suschitzky makes a similar argument: “By casting Wagner as Rameau’s nemesis, and Rameau, in turn,

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<sup>233</sup> Quoted in Suschitzky, “Debussy’s Rameau,” 402.

<sup>234</sup> Marianne Wheeldon, “Debussy and la Sonata Cyclique,” *The Journal of Musicology*, 22:4 (2005): 676-78.

<sup>235</sup> Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music*, 38-49.

<sup>236</sup> Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics* 176-78.

<sup>237</sup> Michael Downes, “Wagner and the *Musicien Français*: An Interpretation of Debussy’s Criticism,” *Cahiers Debussy* 17-18 (1994): 3-13.



as a panacea against Wagnerism, Debussy made the case for his own music as the embodiment of a renewed French tradition.”<sup>238</sup>

Following Wheeldon, Downes, Suchitzky, and Fulcher, I contend that Rameau was, for Debussy, less a source of genuine influence than a figurehead who symbolized anti-Wagnerian nationalism. He was the official face of French musical nationalism, but he was not necessarily the primary inspiration for the wide range of musical styles (including Debussy’s) that flourished in fin-de-siècle France. Thus, Debussy’s claims of kinship with Rameau are highly polemical; I would even go so far as to call them disingenuous, insofar as Debussy exaggerated the extent to which he was influenced by Rameau. I would locate Debussy’s musical expression of Frenchness not in his superficial “Baroque-isms,” but rather in his sustained and thorough engagement with musical exoticism; this claim, which I began to develop in the first chapter, will be taken up at greater length in due course. First, however, we must examine Debussy’s attitude toward Wagner, for it was in response to the German titan that Debussy cultivated his “French” musical style.

### *Debussy’s Obsession with Wagner*

As we have seen, Debussy’s antipathy toward Germanic profundity inflects many of his prose writings. Although Debussy was critical of German music in general, it was Wagner who became the primary target of Debussy’s anti-Germanic sentiments. In a 1906 letter, Debussy referred scornfully to “Wagner’s bombastic metaphysics.” He rails against Wagner’s influence on French music: “We tolerated

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<sup>238</sup> Suchitzky, “Debussy’s Rameau,” 403.

overblown orchestras, tortuous forms, cheap luxury and clashing colors.”<sup>239</sup> In a 1907 letter, he wrote, “I read Bedier’s *Roman de Tristan* when it first came out and was so struck by it I immediately had the idea of turning it into an opera. I felt it was necessary to give Tristan back his legendary characteristics, so badly deformed by Wagner and by the suspect, metaphysical approach which, there more than anywhere, resists explanation.”<sup>240</sup> Here, Debussy is arguing that Wagner deformed the legend of *Tristan und Isolde* by placing it in the service of a transcendent aesthetic project. He views Wagner’s operatic project as pretentious and overblown; he refers scathingly to Wagner’s “bombastic metaphysics” and “false profundity.”<sup>241</sup> These, and other, quotes will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, after we have examined Wagnerian metaphysics and Nietzsche’s response to it.

Debussy’s attitude toward Wagner was not, however, as one-sided as the above passages might suggest. He had been an ardent Wagnerian in his youth. During his years at the Paris Conservatory, he was steeped in the music of Wagner; Lockspeiser points out that “one winter evening after class time the score was set out on the piano of the Overture to *Tannhäuser*,” and Debussy and his professor “became so absorbed in the novel Wagnerian harmonies that they lost all sense of time.”<sup>242</sup> Debussy’s experience with Wagner was not limited to piano-vocal scores; he attended the Bayreuth festival in 1888, where he heard *Parsifal* and

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<sup>239</sup> François Lesure, ed. *Debussy on Music*, 323

<sup>240</sup> *Debussy Letters*, trans. Roger Nicholas, 180.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>242</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* Vol. 1, 1862-1902 (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1966), 32.

*Meistersinger*. In 1889 he returned to Bayreuth, hearing *Parsifal*, *Meistersinger* and *Tristan*.<sup>243</sup> His experiences at Bayreuth evidently made a strong impression on him, for in 1889 he declared that Wagner was one of his favorite composers.<sup>244</sup> Even in the early 1890s, Debussy continued to engage actively with the music of Wagner. In 1893, he played the musical examples for French poet Catulle Mendès' series of lectures on Wagner.<sup>245</sup>

Many of Debussy's early compositions were heavily influenced by Wagner. His 1888 cantata *La Damoiselle Édue*, for instance, imitates Wagner's conception of endless melody and leitmotivic integration, as John R. Clevenger points out.<sup>246</sup> Clevenger observes that "The presence of true Wagnerian leitmotifs in *Daniel*, *Le Gladiateur*, *Diane au Bois*, and *La Damoiselle Édue*...proves that Debussy submitted totally and willingly to Wagner's influence from the very outset of his activity as a dramatic composer."<sup>247</sup> Laloy observes that, after *Damoiselle*, Debussy successfully freed himself from the influence of Wagner: "He was won over by the grandeur of Wagner, but not for long: only *La Damoiselle Édue* attests to some degree of admiration; there is none in *Printemps*, and Wagner is completely rejected in the compositions that follow."<sup>248</sup> Debussy's post-1890 writings bear out this observation, for they are (as we have seen) heavily critical of Wagner.

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<sup>243</sup> Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 239.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>245</sup> Rosemary Lloyd, "Debussy, Mallarmé, and 'Les Mardis,'" *Debussy and His World*, ed. Jane F. Fulcher (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 261.

<sup>246</sup> John R. Clevenger, "Debussy's Rome Cantatas," *Debussy and His World*, Fulcher, Jane F., ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 76.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>248</sup> Louis Laloy, "Early Influences on Debussy," *Louis Laloy on Debussy, Ravel, and Stravinsky*, trans. and ed. Deborah Priest (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), 52.

But even after disavowing Wagnerian aesthetics, Debussy continued to suffer from a severe case of anxiety of influence, especially while composing *Pélleas et Mélisande*. He struggled to purge all traces of Wagnerian influence from his drafts of the opera, repeatedly writing and rewriting passages until he was certain that they were free of Wagner's stylistic fingerprints. He poured out his anguished feelings in an 1893 letter to Chausson: "I was premature in crying 'success' over [an early sketch for] *Pélleas et Mélisande*....After a sleepless night (the bringer of truth) I had to admit it wouldn't do at all....The ghost of old Klingsor, alias R. Wagner, kept appearing in the corner of a bar, so I've torn the whole thing up."<sup>249</sup>

Debussy's urgent desire to purge all traces of Wagner from his music led him, I will argue, to embrace musical exoticism as an anti-Wagnerian antidote. I am not the first scholar to view French exoticism as a nationalistic response to foreign influence. Revuluri argues that French citizens felt threatened by the growing presence of non-Western foreigners in France. She attempts to show that the 1889 World's Fair did not only bolster national pride, but it also threatened national identity by bringing an influx of foreign music and customs to France. She quotes a passage by Philippe Gille, a fin-de-siecle French art critic, in which he rails against non-Western influences on French art: "The jury itself has ceded to the contagiousness of anthropomorphism in crowning, a few years from now, an Ethiopian genie or a gorilla as masterpieces of sculpture."<sup>250</sup> Revuluri concludes

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<sup>249</sup> Quoted in Richard Taruskin, "The First Modernist," *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 199.

<sup>250</sup> Quoted in Revuluri, *Exoticism and Absorption*, 28.

that “Gille reveals an underlying anxiety here that is caused by the overall combination of fascination and disgust inspired by exotic elements.”<sup>251</sup>

Revuluri argues that French ethnomusicologists responded to this anxiety by drawing on a French code of musical exoticism in their transcriptions. The transcription of non-Western music must have been a daunting task for the French transcribers, and they fell back on a familiar set of French exotic tropes. The use of these tropes enabled the transcribers to put a French stamp on the foreign music that was performed at the World’s Fair.<sup>252</sup> I agree with Revuluri that French exotic markers, when they show up in French transcriptions, reflect national anxiety about the foreign sounds of non-Western cultures.

But these same exotic markers, when used in French art music, express a different form of anxiety. Here, I hope to show that they indicate a defensive reaction to German musical influence. Significantly, then, French ethnomusicologists and French composers sought to strengthen national identity through the use of exotic markers. But the ethnomusicologists were responding to a non-Western threat, whereas Debussy was responding to a German threat.

Within the sphere of French art music, I’ve argued throughout this dissertation that German music posed an enormous threat to French national identity. In fact, in a 1903 article entitled “The Revival of French Music: The Baneful Influence of Wagner Declining,” the French music critic Camille Maclair writes, “It was not until recent times that French music emerged from that vast cloud that Bayreuth

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<sup>251</sup> Revuluri, *Exoticism and Absorption*, 29.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 11.

cast upon the whole world.”<sup>253</sup> How did French composers such as Debussy emerge from this threatening cloud? In response to this question, I aim to demonstrate that Debussy sought refuge in French exoticism as an antidote to German influence. To understand why he viewed exotic markers as a strategy of resistance against Wagner, we must examine Nietzsche’s polemical monograph *Case of Wagner* and its reception in France.

### *Nietzsche in France*

Let us turn to one of the major (and currently overlooked) influences on French anti-Wagnerism and the exotic tradition: the writings of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Like Debussy, Nietzsche started out as an ardent Wagnerian and later turned violently against his former idol. During the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nietzsche’s writings exploded onto the French cultural scene, as Christopher Forth discusses in *Zarathustra in Paris*, a thorough study of Nietzsche’s enthusiastic reception in French literary circles.<sup>254</sup> In fact, Debussy is documented to have read an 1892 French translation of Nietzsche’s polemic *Case of Wagner*, and (as we will discover later in this chapter) several letters and articles by Debussy refer admiringly to Nietzsche’s musical aesthetics. Many fin-de-siècle French music journals, such as *La Revue Musicale*, *Le Ménestrel*, and *Le Guide Musical* frequently refer to Nietzsche and his enormous impact on French musical culture, indicating the extent to which Nietzsche

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<sup>253</sup> Camille Mauclair, “The Revival of French Music: The Baneful Influence of Wagner Declining,” translated in *Public Opinion* 34 (1903): 593

<sup>254</sup> Christopher Forth, *Zarathustra in Paris: The Nietzsche Vogue in France 1891-1918* (Chicago: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).

influenced the direction of French music. Nietzsche's profound influence on French music has been overlooked by current-day scholars.

Before examining *Case of Wagner* in detail, it is necessary to examine some French journal articles on Nietzsche, to gain a sense of his importance and meaning in fin-de-siècle French musical culture. Nietzsche's musical aesthetics, particularly his views on Wagner, were the subject of countless journal articles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, in 1898 *Le Guide Musical* published an article by Maurice Kufferath, "Les Philosophes et la Musique: Tolstoi et Nietzsche."<sup>255</sup> The following year, the same journal published another article by Kufferath, "F. Nietzsche et R. Wagner," discussing Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner*.<sup>256</sup> The 1905 issue of *Le Mercure Musical* features a long article entitled "Les Idées de Nietzsche sur la Musique." This article analyzes Nietzsche's turn away from Wagner and toward Bizet, pointing out that *Carmen* epitomized the type of Mediterranean music that Nietzsche admired: "*Carmen* représente pour lui la musique saine, dionysiaque."<sup>257</sup> In the same year, the *Revue Française de Musique* published an article, "Des Deux Versants: A propos d'une illustre amilie rompue: Wagner et Nietzsche," which (as the title signals) discusses Nietzsche's break with

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<sup>255</sup> Maurice Kufferath "Les Philosophes et la Musique: Tolstoi et Nietzsche," *Le Guide Musical* 44:43 (23 Octobre 1898): 775.

<sup>256</sup> Maurice Kufferath, "Fr. Nietzsche and R. Wagner," *Le Guide Musical* 45:18 (30 Avril 1899): 407.

<sup>257</sup> Jacques Meraly, "Les Idées de Nietzsche sur la Musique," *Le Mercure Musical* (1905): 131. "*Carmen* represented for him a healthy, dionysian music." (Translation my own.)

Wagner and turn toward Bizet.<sup>258</sup> These, and other, articles illustrate Nietzsche's popularity in French musical circles.

Indicating the extent to which Nietzsche was admired and discussed in French music periodicals, *Le Guide Musical* published a lengthy obituary of Nietzsche in 1900 (the year of his death). The obituary describes *Case of Wagner* as a "violent diatribe against Wagner that had an enormous influence."<sup>259</sup> This demonstrates that *Case of Wagner* was regarded in France as an enormously influential work. Due to French musicians' upsurge of interest in Nietzsche, the *Revue Musicale* published a short blurb announcing the publication of Nietzsche's musical compositions.<sup>260</sup>

Many French articles on *Carmen* refer to Nietzsche's praise of Bizet and critique of Wagner. Henry Gauthier-Villars observes that "The systematic love of *Carmen*, a means of combat in the hands of the author of *Case of Wagner*, has become an article of faith among the majority of critiques of Germany."<sup>261</sup> We will see, later in this chapter, why Nietzsche's critique of Wagner became an article of faith among French musicians, and how it enabled Frenchmen to use exoticism as a weapon against Wagner.

Nietzsche was frequently referenced not only in French journal articles, but also in French books on music. For instance, in his study of Debussy's music, Louis Laloy approvingly cited Nietzsche's critique of Wagner: "We need to deliver

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<sup>258</sup> Albert Joel, "Les Deux Versants: À propos d'une illustre amitié rompue: Wagner et Nietzsche," *Revue Française de Musique* (1905): 311-314.

<sup>259</sup> "Le Cas Wagner, violente diatribe contre Wagner qui eut un retentissement énorme."

"Nécrologie," *Le Guide Musical* 46 (1900): 625.

<sup>260</sup> "Nietzsche Compositeur," *Revue Musicale* (1905): 467.

<sup>261</sup> "L'amour systématique de *Carmen*, partition de combat entre les mains de l'auteur du *Fall Wagner*, est devenu un article de foi chez la plupart des critiques allemands." Henry Gauthier-Villars, "Georges Bizet," *Le Guide Musical* 53 (1907): 818.



ourselves from Wagner's prestige...The rebirth, not only of our music, but, as Nietzsche recognized, of all music, comes at this price."<sup>262</sup> Nietzsche's importance in French musical circles continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century; as late as 1918, Julien Tiersot quotes extensively from *Case of Wagner* in his music history book *Un Demi-Siècle de Musique Française*. Tiersot prefaces the quotation as follows: "Let us reread the words that Nietzsche dedicated to Bizet and his works; it is good and useful for them to penetrate us today."<sup>263</sup> In urging his readers to let Nietzsche's words penetrate them, Tiersot implies that the German philosopher has valuable advice to offer to French musicians.

In fact, even into the 1920s, Nietzsche was still being cited in French books and articles. For example, Roland-Manuel's 1921 article on Ravel begins with a quote from the monograph *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in which Nietzsche accuses Wagnerian opera of being too vulgar and theatrical, and urges composers to write elegant, dainty, non-Wagnerian music. By using this quote at the beginning of an article on Ravel, Roland-Manuel is implying that Ravel wrote the type of music that Nietzsche calls for.

Although Nietzsche's influence on French exoticism was well-known at the time, contemporary scholarship rarely focuses on this topic. However, Michael Puri draws our attention to a different strand of Nietzsche's influence on French music. As Puri argues, Nietzsche's notion of Dionysian art influenced Ravel's

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<sup>262</sup> "qu'il nous deliverait du prestige wagnerien...La renaissance, non de notre musique seulement, mais, comme l'a vu Nietzsche, de la musique entiere, etait à ce prix." Louis Laloy, *Claude Debussy* (Paris: Les Bibliophiles Fantaisistes, 1909), 33.

<sup>263</sup> "Relisons les paroles que Nietzsche a consacrées à Bizet et à son oeuvre: il est bon et utile que nous nous en penetrions aujourd'hui." Julien Tiersot, *Un Demi-Siècle de Musique Française: Entre les Deux Guerres, 1870-1917* (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1918), 41.

musical aesthetics: “[E]ven if Ravel had never read a word of Nietzsche...his Dionysian descriptions of Greek tragedy in *La Valse* are undoubtedly the result of Nietzsche’s discursive influence.”<sup>264</sup> As Puri points out, Nietzsche’s ideas were in the air in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century France. Surrounded by this Nietzschean atmosphere, Debussy was most likely influenced by certain aspects of Nietzsche’s thought that resonated with his own interests—anti-Wagnerism, nationalism, and exoticism. In the following section, I present some evidence of Debussy’s familiarity with Nietzschean ideas.

### *Debussy and Nietzsche*

Debussy’s writings on music contain several references to Nietzsche, indicating that he had read Nietzsche and was familiar with the *Case of Wagner*. In a music review, written in March 1903, Debussy wrote about Nietzsche’s influence on Strauss. He argued that Strauss “must have inherited from Nietzsche a scorn for piffling sentimentalities and also the desire that music should no longer be merely a bringer of light into our darkness, but that it should replace the sun itself. I can assure you there is plenty of sun in the music of R. Strauss.”<sup>265</sup> This passage demonstrates that Debussy had read Nietzsche and was aware that Nietzsche called for bright, sunny music (something that will be discussed in greater detail below). The passage also indicates that Debussy was willing to admire some German music,

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<sup>264</sup> Michael Puri, *Ravel the Decadent: Memory, Sublimation, and Desire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 232.

<sup>265</sup> François Lesure, ed., *Debussy on Music*, 161.

as long as this music eschewed Wagnerian gloom in favor of Nietzschean affirmation.

In the margin of a draft for an opera about Orpheus (which was left unfinished), Debussy writes, “To make of Orpheus what Nietzsche made of Zarathustra: his own.”<sup>266</sup> Here, Debussy explicitly identifies with Nietzsche, stating that he hopes to emulate Nietzsche’s work on Zarathustra. This offers evidence of Debussy’s high regard for Nietzsche.

In fact, in a 1913 article in *Le Matin*, Debussy quoted Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: “All good things laugh.”<sup>267</sup> The idea of laughter and playfulness is very important to Nietzsche; it is a major theme in the *Case of Wagner* and *Zarathustra*, and we will return to this theme (and its importance to Debussy) later in the chapter.

The most striking evidence of Debussy’s interest in Nietzsche comes from Debussy’s close friend René Peter. In his memoir, *Claude Debussy*, Peter recalls that Debussy “read Nietzsche’s *Case of Wagner* with passionate amusement.”<sup>268</sup> According to Peter, Debussy was particularly struck by the first section of *Case of Wagner*, in which Nietzsche praises Bizet’s opera *Carmen* as an antidote to Wagner. Debussy and Peter had a spirited discussion of *Case of Wagner*, during which Debussy, seating himself at the piano, delivered an emotionally wrenching

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<sup>266</sup> Quoted in E. Kushner, “Orphée et l’Orphisme chez Victor Segalen,” *Cahiers de l’Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises*, 22 (1970): 203.

<sup>267</sup> “Toutes les bonnes choses rient.” Debussy, “Jeux,” *Le Matin* 15 Mai 1913, reprinted in *Claude Debussy: Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 242.

<sup>268</sup> “Avait lu avec un amusement passionné le *Cas Wagner*, de Nietzsche.” René Peter, *Claude Debussy*. (Gallimard, 1931), 63.

performance of Don Jose's final aria.<sup>269</sup> Peter recalls that Debussy was moved by Nietzsche's writings and Bizet's opera: "His [Debussy's] voice wept and his eyes did too."<sup>270</sup> According to Peter, Debussy then exclaimed: "You see....I sometimes believe that there is in my music a little of that emotion, that color. Just between us, that may only be French music, but your little Bayreuth friend still has some way to go before he can twist our hearts in that way!"<sup>271</sup> This remark is telling, for it reflects Debussy's strong sense of kinship with the exotic music of Bizet—and his firm belief, bolstered by Nietzsche, that French exotic music is superior to the works of his "little Bayreuth friend." In the throes of a Nietzsche-inspired obsession with Bizet's music, Debussy continued to sing and play *Carmen* until well into the wee hours of the morning. This demonstrates that Nietzsche's reception of *Carmen* made a lasting impression on Debussy, and stirred up in him a deep (and patriotic) love of Bizet's exotic music.<sup>272</sup>

Now that we have briefly examined the French reception of Nietzsche's anti-Wagnerian writings, it is time to turn to the *Case of Wagner* itself, the work that sparked so much interest among French musicians. After we have examined the

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>270</sup> "Sa voix pluraît et ses yeux même." Ibid., 63. (Translation my own.)

<sup>271</sup> "Tu vois....Je crois parfois sentir dans ma musique un peu de cette emotion-la, de cette couleur....Dis donc, tout de même, entre nous, hein? Ça a beau n'être que de la musique française, il peut encotre s'aligner, ton petit ami de Bayreuth, avant de nous tortiller au coeur comme ça!" Ibid., 64. (Translation my own.)

<sup>272</sup> Even before Debussy encountered Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner*, a hearty appreciation of *Carmen* had already been instilled in him by Brahms, who took Debussy to a performance of *Carmen* in Vienna. Throughout the entire evening, Brahms (who adored *Carmen* and had seen it 21 times) spoke at great length about his deep love of *Carmen* and helped the young Debussy to develop a strong attachment to this work. Brahms' praise of *Carmen* as a truly French work would have made a profound impression on the young nationalistic Debussy. Thus, Debussy's conversations with Brahms about the merits of *Carmen* enabled Debussy to appreciate more deeply Nietzsche's remarks on this opera; Brahms laid the groundwork for Debussy's engagement with *Case of Wagner*. Andrew de Ternant, "Debussy and Brahms," *Musical Times* 65:977 (1924): 608-609.

*Case of Wagner*, we will return to the French reception of Nietzsche, examining in detail many French musicians' responses to Nietzsche's writings.

### ***Nietzsche's Case of Wagner***

In *Case of Wagner* (1888), Nietzsche launches a full-scale attack upon Wagnerian metaphysics. As a firm believer in the value of the physical world, Nietzsche criticized Wagner's notion of transcendence through death. Castigating Wagner for glorifying death and devaluing life, he writes: "There is nothing weary, nothing decrepit, nothing fatal and hostile to life in the matters of this spirit that his [Wagner's] art does not secretly safeguard: it is the blackest obscurantism that he conceals in the ideal's shrouds of light....He flatters everything Christian." Here, Nietzsche implies that Wagner's metaphysical aesthetics are nihilistic and morbid, hostile to the physical world and thus "hostile to life." He is suggesting that Wagner's primary themes, redemption and the ecstasy of death, are secretly Christian—despite Wagner's avowed atheism. Like a devout Christian, Wagner valorizes the bliss of a metaphysical world that can be attained only through death. As Gary Tomlinson has observed, Nietzsche detested Wagner's "redemptive metaphysics that trucks in a mélange of Schopenhauerian pessimism and Christian negation of life, body, and sensibility."<sup>273</sup>

In addition to viewing Wagnerian opera as nihilistic, Nietzsche also perceives it as pretentious and bombastic. He writes that Wagner prefers "that which is great, sublime, gigantic—that which moves *masses*?" Once more: it is easier to be gigantic

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<sup>273</sup> Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 120.

than to be beautiful; we know that.” Here, he is implying that Wagner cultivates the appearance of “sublimity” in order to overwhelm and impress the spectator.

Several paragraphs later, he sarcastically paraphrases what he perceives as Wagner’s aesthetic stance: “To elevate men one has to be sublime oneself. Let us walk on clouds, let us harangue the infinite, let us surround ourselves with symbols!”<sup>274</sup> Here, Nietzsche suggests that Wagner decks himself out in sublime, metaphysical trappings. These trappings, he implies, are fake and bombastic: “Open your ears: everything that ever grew on the soil of *impoverished* life, all of the counterfeiting of transcendence and beyond, has found its most sublime advocate in Wagner’s art.”<sup>275</sup> Here, his use of the word “counterfeiting” suggests that he views Wagnerian metaphysics as a sham.

In *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche repeatedly refers to Wagner (and his operas) as diseased and poisonous. For instance, he writes: “Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn’t he rather a sickness? He makes sick whatever he touches—*he has made music sick*.”<sup>276</sup> Here, Nietzsche implies that Wagnerian opera is thoroughly contaminated by toxins—he even suggests that Wagnerian opera is nothing *but* a toxic waste dump. In fact, he claims that Wagner is a disease, not a person. Thus, as the above passages show, Nietzsche perceived Wagnerian opera as a poisoned—and poisonous—art form.

Along strikingly similar lines, Debussy also viewed Wagner as a poisoner. In an 1896 letter (several years after the publication in French of *Case of Wagner*),

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<sup>274</sup> Nietzsche, “The Case of Wagner” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans and ed., Walter Kaufmann (Modern Library, 1992), 624.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 639.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 620.

Debussy criticizes the writer Houston Stewart Chamberlain for having fallen under Wagner's dangerous spell. He writes, "He [Chamberlain] is still at the Wagner stage too (can you imagine?) and believes in the recipes propounded by that old poisoner!"<sup>277</sup> Thus, Debussy and Nietzsche share the same opinion of Wagner: both of them view Wagner as a poisonous, dangerous influence.

In the opening section of *Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche celebrates the exotic elements in Bizet's opera *Carmen* as an antidote to Wagnerian metaphysics. He praises *Carmen* for its sensual exoticism, hailing its "African cheerfulness" and "southern, brown, burnt sensibility" as the antithesis of Wagner's morbid aesthetics. He is especially fond of the exotic Spanish-flavored dances—the habaneras and seguidillas—in *Carmen*; he writes: "With *Carmen* one takes leave of the damp north, of all the steam of the Wagnerian ideal...How soothingly the Moorish dance speaks to us!" He implies that *Carmen*, with its exotic "Moorish" dances, is rooted in the body, not the soul; thus, it takes leave of Wagner's metaphysical ideal. Indeed, as Susan McClary observes, "Bizet grounds Carmen's music in the physical impulses of exotic, pseudo-gypsy dance."<sup>278</sup> Because it is grounded in the bodily rhythms of exotic dance, Bizet's opera impressed Nietzsche as a life-affirming, anti-metaphysical work. In *The Case of Wagner*, then, Nietzsche opposes Wagnerian metaphysics to exoticism, figuring French exotic opera as an antidote to Wagner.

*Carmen* is, in fact, a doubly exotic opera: it is set in Spain, which provides the stimulus for the exotic-sounding Spanish dances such as the Seguidilla, and its

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<sup>277</sup> *Debussy Letters*, trans. Roger Nicholas, 83.

<sup>278</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (University Of Minnesota Press, 2002), 57.

protagonist is a gypsy, a figure who epitomizes alterity and the sensual allure of the exotic Other. Bizet's portrayal of an exotic gypsy world seemed to Nietzsche to represent a tantalizing pagan land far from Teutonic disease and metaphysical pretensions—an exotic escape from Germany's maladies.

Nietzsche contrasts the unfettered sexuality of Bizet's opera with Wagner's grandiose, transcendent aspirations; he argues that *Carmen* is “free from the *lie* of the grand style!” By “grand style,” he is referring to Wagner's evocation of the metaphysical will. In contrast to Wagner's transcendent aspirations, *Carmen* strikes Nietzsche as a refreshingly down-to-earth opera. He praises its cheerful, unpretentious rhythmic vitality “as a contrast to the polyp in music, to ‘endless melody.’”<sup>279</sup>

He describes *Carmen* as a “Southern” work: “I envy Bizet for having had the courage for this sensibility which had hitherto had no language in the cultivated music of Europe—for this more southern, brown, burnt sensibility.”<sup>280</sup> Here, he associates *Carmen* with what he sees as a sunny, healthy, invigorating Southern climate—an antidote to Wagner's foggy German metaphysics. Linking *Carmen* with Southern sunshine, and Wagnerian opera with Northern (Germanic) fog, he claims that Wagner makes his “fine weather vanish.” In fact, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche explicitly praises *Carmen* for its Southern flavor: “It was for them [the ‘good Europeans,’ who love the south in the north and the north in the south] that *Bizet* made music, this last genius to see a new beauty and seduction—who

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<sup>279</sup> Nietzsche, *Case of Wagner*, 613.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 614.



discovered a piece of *the south of music*.”<sup>281</sup>

Nietzsche was highly critical of German music, championing French music as superior. Significantly, Nietzsche’s formula “*il faut méditerraniser la musique*” is in French. By inserting a line of French into his German text, he is urging French composers to take up the project of “Mediterranization”. Nietzsche views Bizet and Wagner as symbols of their respective countries: Bizet is for Nietzsche typically French, and Wagner typically German. Hence, in hailing Bizet’s *Carmen* as an antidote to Wagner, I believe that Nietzsche is also celebrating French music more generally. His celebration of French *joie de vivre* would have found a receptive audience in Debussy. Indeed, Nietzsche’s musical aesthetics resonate with French nationalist discourses. To be sure, Nietzsche was German—but his allegiance, at least in terms of his musical taste, was to France.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) he praises France for what he perceives as its cultural superiority to Germany. He writes that the French “temperament, periodically turned toward and away from the south, in which from time to time Provençal and Ligurian blood foams over, protects them against the gruesome northern gray on gray and the sunless concept-spooking and anemia—the disease of *German* taste.”<sup>282</sup> Here, Nietzsche implies that the French love of Southern exoticism serves as protection from the influence of Germanic metaphysics. He asserts that French composers are capable of writing “a supra-German music that does not fade away at the sight of the voluptuous blue sea and the brightness of the

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<sup>281</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Basic Writings of Nietzsche. Trans and ed. (Walter Kaufmann. Modern Library, 1992), 195.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

Mediterranean sky, nor does it turn yellow and then pale as all German music does.”<sup>283</sup> In this passage, he contends that German composers shrink away from the exotic, preferring abstract, metaphysical concepts. But French composers, he suggests, embrace the vibrant energies of exoticism.<sup>284</sup>

### *Wagnerian Metaphysics*

When Nietzsche denounces Wagnerian metaphysics as morbid and decadent, to what is he responding? Why did Wagnerian opera become the target of Nietzsche’s vitriolic critique of Western metaphysics? Taking *Tristan* and *Parsifal* as our case studies, we will analyze Wagner’s metaphysical aesthetics.

Drawing on received musicological wisdom, scholars such as Eric Chafe and Richard Taruskin have discussed the ways in which *Tristan* draws heavily on Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy of the will.<sup>285</sup> In his 1818 philosophical treatise *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer argues that the metaphysical world consists of a primal, undifferentiated will, a formless mass of energy. The physical world is, for Schopenhauer, an embodiment of the metaphysical will. Humans are fashioned out of the raw material of this will, and as such we are subject to constant desires and yearnings that are generated by our individual wills. He paints a bleak picture of human life as a miserable experience, rife with frustration, unfulfilled

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> This passage was well-known in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Paris. It was quoted and briefly discussed in the influential French arts journal *Revue des Deux Mondes*. See Camille Bellaigue, “L’Évolution Musicale de Nietzsche,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1905): 915.

<sup>285</sup> Eric Chafe, *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: The Musical Revolution of Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

desire, and sheer misery. He asserts that feelings of satisfaction and contentment are tragically short-lived; no sooner is one wish granted than a new one crops up. We are caught in a nearly continual cycle of unfulfilled desire: “Now, the nature of man consists in this, that his will strives, is satisfied and strives anew, and so on forever.”<sup>286</sup> Because we are plagued by unfulfilled desire, forced by our restless wills to strive ceaselessly, the physical world, for Schopenhauer, offers nothing but misery, frustration, and sorrow. Death, however, liberates us from the painful shackles of our bodily will, enabling us to gain access to a metaphysical world of bliss.

But Schopenhauer argues that music offers us a brief foretaste of this bliss, temporarily liberating us from the painful shackles of our bodily will. He argues that music *is* metaphysics: “Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the copy of the will itself.”<sup>287</sup> So directly does music reflect the will that he writes, “We might, therefore, just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will.”<sup>288</sup> Thus, in Schopenhauer’s account, music transcends the false world of appearances and offers a glimpse of the true, metaphysical essence of life.

Wagner encountered Schopenhauer’s philosophy in 1854, and this encounter shaped all of his subsequent prose writings and operas. In his monograph *Religion and Art*, Wagner, drawing on Schopenhauer’s aesthetics, asserts that music is the only art form capable of achieving independence from the physical world; it offers

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<sup>286</sup> Artur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co., 1891), 341.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

the listener “a tone-shape completely removed from the world of appearances, not to be compared with anything physical.”<sup>289</sup> In his 1870 essay, “Beethoven,” Wagner leaves the reader in no doubt as to the inspiration for his musical aesthetics: “It was Schopenhauer who first defined the position of music among the arts with philosophic clearness, ascribing to it a different nature from that of either plastic or poetic art.”<sup>290</sup> Wagner ascribes to Schopenhauer’s lofty conception of music as the most universal of all arts: “We can but take it that the individual will awakes in the musician as the universal will.”<sup>291</sup>

*Tristan und Isolde* bears the unmistakable imprint of Schopenhauer’s influence. Throughout much of the opera, the lovers are beset by restless yearnings, tormented by their desires. Tristan and Isolde find peace only in death, which allows them to transcend the suffering associated with the physical world. Thus, the quest for transcendence is at the heart of *Tristan*. The music of *Tristan* powerfully enacts this quest. Replete with unresolved dissonances, evaded cadences, and ambiguous chromatic harmonies, the music portrays the restless motion of the will. The opera does not reach a satisfying, restful tonic cadence until the lovers die, reflecting Schopenhauer’s belief that death, and death alone, brings metaphysical comfort and peace. Until the final death scene, the music continually sidesteps resolution and cadential closure, expressing a restless longing for transcendence and death. Indeed, Wagner himself wrote that the score of *Tristan*

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<sup>289</sup> Wagner, *Religion and Art*, (Religion und Kunst, 1880). Trans. William Ashton Ellis, 1897 (University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 224.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

portrays “unquenchable, ever-regenerated longing—languishing, thirsting; the only redemption—death, extinction, external sleep!”<sup>292</sup>

The *Tristan* prelude—the measures quoted by Debussy—is laden with what Wagner called “ever-regenerated longing.” The opening chord—the Tristan chord—is painfully dissonant. It is followed by another dissonant chord, an unresolved dominant seventh. The entire phrase is then repeated, twice, in sequence, heightening the tonal drama and postponing tonic resolution. Even at the end of the third phrase, when it seems that a cadence on the tonic is inevitable, Wagner sidesteps the expected resolution and moves instead to a deceptive cadence on the submediant (ex. 44, m. 17).

The *Tristan* prelude, then, is replete with unresolved dissonances, constantly reaching after unattainable goals, striving in vain toward a cadence on the tonic. The ceaseless striving of the music portrays the endless, agonized striving of the human will, condemned to seek and never find. Wagner’s avoidance of tonic resolution resonates powerfully with Schopenhauer’s musical aesthetics. In *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer argues that music offers an analogue to the restless motion of the will: “now, the nature of man is this, that his will strives...And corresponding to this the nature of melody is a constant digression and deviation from the key-note in a thousand ways, not only to the harmonious intervals to the third and dominant, but to every tone, to the dissonant sevenths and the superfluous degrees.”<sup>293</sup> In order to express the striving of the will, Wagner

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<sup>292</sup> Quoted in Richard Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music*, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 540.

<sup>293</sup> Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea*, 336.

# Tristan und Isolde.

## Erster Aufzug.

Einleitung.

Richard Wagner.

♩ Langsam und schmachkend.

The musical score is written for piano in G major, 3/4 time. It consists of five systems of staves. The first system begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Langsam und schmachkend.' (Slow and fading). The first staff of the first system is marked *pp* (pianissimo). The second system includes markings for *cresc.* (crescendo), *dim.* (diminuendo), and *cresc.* followed by *sf* (sforzando). The third system includes markings for *p* (piano), *p*, and *pp*. The fourth system includes markings for *sf* (sforzando), *più f* (further fortissimo), and *ff* (fortissimo). The fifth system includes markings for *col Ped. sempre* (with the pedal, always), *dim.* (diminuendo), *p* (piano), *poco rall.* (a little slower), *cresc.* (crescendo), and *riten.* (ritardando). The score features a variety of musical notations, including eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, and full notes, as well as rests and dynamic markings.

Example 44. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 1, Introduction (1865), mm. 1-17

takes full advantage of the musical digressions and deviations mentioned by Schopenhauer. Indeed, Wagner's substitution of the submediant in place of the expected tonic chord is exactly the type of "digression and deviation from the key-note" that Schopenhauer describes.

Act II, which depicts a secret rendezvous between Tristan and Isolde, resonates powerfully with Schopenhauerian themes. Much of this act consists of a lengthy love duet between Tristan and Isolde, who find themselves alone together at last. Near the beginning of the act, Isolde sings, "I wanted to escape the light of day, to draw you with me off into the night, where my heart promised me the end of deception; where the feared delusion and lies would disappear; there to drink to you eternal love, I wanted to consecrate you, in union with me, to death."<sup>294</sup> Tristan responds by singing: "O now were we by night enchanted, the troublesome day with envy haunted might part us with its lies, but never dazzle our eyes! For its empty glare, and its glittering light, are flouted by all that love the night." Here, Wagner glorifies nighttime as a realm of spiritual truth and transcendence. By equating daytime with the pain and delusion of the physical world, and associating the evening with the transcendent bliss of death, Wagner is referencing Schopenhauerian ideas.

Throughout Act II, Tristan and Isolde experience a foretaste of the transcendent night of the hereafter; they temporarily transcend the physical world, and briefly inhabit a higher metaphysical plane of existence. The

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<sup>294</sup> Translation by Eric Chafe, *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: The Musical Revolution of Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde"* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 202-203.

“otherworldliness” of this act is underscored when the maidservant Brangäne attempts to interrupt the lovers to warn them that Isolde’s husband will be arriving home soon. But the lovers are literally in another world and thus cannot hear Brangäne’s words. Thus, her warnings fall on deaf ears. In order to show that Brangäne is in a different world than the lovers, Wagner puts her music in a different key, casting the musical action on two different planes of existence—Brangäne’s physical world, and the lovers’ metaphysical world (ex. 45, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 2, Scene 2).

The final moments of Act II are even more strikingly Schopenhauerian, enacting the restless striving of the Schopenhauerian will. In order to portray the lovers’ dissatisfaction and yearning (and hence to portray the restless will), Wagner avoids tonic resolution in the section beginning with “ohne nennen.” Just at the very moment when resolution seems bound to occur, when the tension seems to have reached the breaking point...the tonic cadence is sidestepped. The music lands on a most unsatisfying ii6 chord instead of the expected tonic harmony. A few measures later, Wagner creates yet another impassioned buildup, reflecting Schopenhauer’s belief that the will is caught in an endless cycle of yearning and striving. The chromatic descent in the bass line, first heard in the “ohne nennen” music, is repeated several measures later, underscoring the cyclical nature of the will. This reprise is accompanied by feverish sequential repetitions of the desire Leitmotif, imbuing the music with a particular fervency and intensity. The descent soon reaches its goal, an incessantly repeated dominant pedal. The sequential repetitions and the sustained dominant pedal. The descent soon reaches its goal, an



*(ersterbend)*  
*(morendo)*

I. wahn - los hold be - wuss - ter Wunsch. (Completely carried away, Tristan  
dream - less, long - a - wait - ed wish. and Isolda sink down and remain  
*(ersterbend)*  
*(morendo)* lying on the flowery bank, their  
heads side by side)

T. wahn - los hold be - wuss - ter Wunsch.  
dream - less, long - a - wait - ed wish.

*piu p* *pp*

Brangæna (from the turret, invisible)

B. Ein - - - - - sam wa - - - - - chend  
Lone - - - - - ly watch - - - - - I

H. In der Nacht,  
here to - - night:

*poco cresc.*

wem der Traum der Lie -  
Ye that dream of love -  
*dim.* *piu p*

Example 45. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 2, Scene 2, (1865)

incessantly repeated dominant pedal. Wagner's relentless repetition of the dominant seventh chord generates a high level of unresolved tension. As Barry Millington puts it, "The sequential repetitions and the sustained dominant pedal raise the tension to an unbearable level, which eventually reaches the point of no return."<sup>295</sup> The level of tension is so high that a tonic cadence on B now seems inevitable. And, at the beginning of Scene III, we finally *do* get the long-awaited B in Isolde's melodic line—but not as part of a B tonic chord. Instead it is harmonized as the seventh of a V9 of V chord (ex. 46, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 2, Scene 2). Hence, the desired goal—the tonic B—is presented in a most *undesirable*, dissonant context. As this distorted "tonic" cadence suggests, the will has been thwarted in its search for satisfaction; the goal once again proves unattainable. Once again, Wagner is musically portraying Schopenhauer's tragic view of the physical world, the view of life as a never-ending battle that is never won—until death.

In the final act of *Tristan und Isolde*, both lovers die—Tristan dies of a wound inflicted by Melot, and Isolde dies of what Wagner calls blissful transfiguration. In the death scene, Wagner recapitulates the final section of the love duet, reprising the frantic chromatic descent and the dramatic arrival on the dominant of B. But the outcome of this impassioned musical buildup differs significantly from its initial statement in Act II. Here, the previously interrupted cadence now succeeds in

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<sup>295</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon, "Eros and Thanatos in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11:3 (1999): 282.

attaining full tonic closure, and the music becomes calm and peaceful. This musical transformation reflects Schopenhauer's belief that we find peace only in death, for

The image displays two systems of musical notation from Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 2, Scene 2 (1865).

The top system features a vocal duet between Isolde (I.) and Tristan (T.). The lyrics are in German and English. The German lyrics are: "ste Lie - bes - su - prem - est". The English lyrics are: "Love's su - prem - est". The piano accompaniment (K.) is marked *p* and *f*.

The bottom system features a vocal solo for Isolde (I.) with the lyrics "lust! thrall!". The piano accompaniment (K.) is marked *ff*.

Example 46. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 2, Scene 2, (1865)

the love duet music achieves, in the final four bars of its reprise, what had so frustratingly been denied in Act II: a resplendent tonic cadence on B. This cadence

provides a (vastly) deferred resolution of several passages in the opera; it reaches the long-awaited cadence on B that had been so strongly prepared, yet so adamantly avoided, in Act II, and it even resolves the E7 chords that were left hanging in the Prelude. Thus, the final cadence of the opera performs a great deal of important musical work, tying up loose ends and bringing about a powerful sense of closure (ex. 47, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 2, Scene 2).

The musical score for Example 47 is in D major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics include "ste Lust! est, best!". The piano part includes markings for *pp*, *morendo*, *rallentando*, and *pp*. The score ends with a final cadence on B.

Example 47. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 2, Scene 2, (1865)

But this cadence also performs a great deal of philosophical work. By deferring musical resolution until the death scene, Wagner is making an emphatic philosophical statement. Through his music, he implies that the physical world

brings nothing but pain, whereas the metaphysical world—the world that we enter after death—brings peace and even bliss. Hence, he devalues the physical world, depicting it a hellish place, rife with dissonant harmonies. He glorifies the metaphysical world as a realm in which desire is at last quelled, a realm of tranquility and deliverance from pain. Thus, Wagner's music loudly trumpets his belief that the metaphysical realm of existence is superior to the physical world.

Through analyzing *Tristan*, we gain a sense of the reasons for Nietzsche's violent opposition to Wagnerian metaphysics. Nietzsche was deeply critical of Wagner for glorifying death and devaluing the physical world; for this reason, he celebrated Bizet as an antidote to Wagner, for Bizet's exotic dances are grounded in the physical world. Wagnerian opera seeks to transcend the body; Bizet's *Carmen* celebrates the sensuality of the body—at least in Nietzsche's reading of the opera.

In order to achieve an even fuller understanding of Wagnerian metaphysics (and Nietzsche's critique of it), let us turn to *Parsifal*. In this opera, as I shall argue, Wagner himself sets up a dichotomy between metaphysics and exoticism.<sup>296</sup> The narrative trajectory of *Parsifal* is predicated upon a duality between the spiritual, transcendent domain of the knights of the Holy Grail, and the erotic, exotic domain of Klingsor's Arabian castle. Wagner links the transcendent world of the Grail with primarily diatonic music. In contrast to the diatonic purity of the grail music, Klingsor's exoticized castle is associated with chromatic music.

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<sup>296</sup> Wagner rarely uses musical markers of exoticism; indeed, exoticism is not generally a part of Wagner's musical language. In *Parsifal*, however, he does use some exotic markers (descending chromatic melodies and augmented seconds).

From the outset of the opera—indeed, in the first few minutes of Act I—the realm of the Grail is established as a world of diatonic purity. The grail motive (ex. 48, Act I, scene 1) is strikingly diatonic and consonant; it does not contain one

Example 48. Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act I, scene 1 (1882)

single chromatic pitch. Consisting largely of primary triads, it is harmonically straightforward and unambiguous in its tonal orientation. It is centered firmly on A-flat; its firm tonal grounding creates a sense of stability and certainty. Hence, the grail motive seems to connote unshakeable faith and devotion. Significantly, this motive carries strong extramusical, as well as musical, connotations. As Carolyn Abbate points out, Wagner’s grail motive is “real music, a melody used for singing the ‘Amen’ at the Dresden cathedral in the nineteenth century.”<sup>297</sup> By quoting a

<sup>297</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 127.

pre-existing hymn melody, Wagner imbues the opening of Act I with an air of spirituality and solemnity.

The grail motive undergoes a striking musical transformation in Act II, which takes place in the exotic world of Klingsor's castle. Here, the grail motive appears in an altered form. It becomes chromatic and dissonant. Fred Lehrdahl observes that "Klingsor's motive modifies the diatonic Grail motive;" he aptly describes this modification as "a chromatic transformation of diatonic space."<sup>298</sup> Barry Millington contends that this chromatic transformation has important extramusical implications: "The propensity for tonal dissolution in *Parsifal*, for diatonicism to yield to chromaticism, is a potent metaphor for the theme of spiritual degeneration."<sup>299</sup>

### *Kundry's Exoticism*

In the original Parsifal legend, Kundry is an ugly, repulsive woman, with grotesque facial features. But Wagner made an extremely significant change in the portrayal of Kundry: he portrays her as a beautiful, alluring temptress. As Linda Hutcheon points out, "It was Wagner's innovative and suggestive changes in the source texts' portrayal of Kundry that made her into a beautiful and dangerous woman."<sup>300</sup> He also makes her into a heavily exoticized woman: when she attempts to seduce Parsifal, she is wearing Arabian clothing, playing the part of an Oriental

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<sup>298</sup> Fred Lehrdahl, *Tonal Pitch Space* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 298.

<sup>299</sup> Barry Millington, *New Grove Guide to Wagner and his Operas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35.

<sup>300</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 82.

femme fatale. Thomas Grey aptly refers to “the seductive aromas of Klingsor’s oriental pleasure-garden and of the perfumed Kundry hiding behind her gauzy ‘Arabian’ veil.”<sup>301</sup> Indeed, the entire seduction scene in Act II unfolds in a highly exoticized space; as Ralph Locke observes, “In Act 2 of *Parsifal* (1882) the garden of a castle ‘richly Arabian’ in style is conjured up by the sorcerer Klingsor, complete with a chorus of Flower Maidens wearing pastel veils and singing the most mellifluous lines in the entire opera, in order to entrap our tenor hero.”<sup>302</sup> Locke adds that “Kundry, the chief seductress in this scene, is specifically dressed ‘in somewhat transparent, fantastical garments—approximately of Arabian style.’”<sup>303</sup> as Hoffman has argued, “Kundry is the East incarnate, the embodiment of just about everything Edward Said summed up as ‘Orientalism’ .... Kundry represents the lure of everything Wagner chose to reject.”<sup>304</sup> Along similar lines, J. Cheryl Exum argues that “Kundry embodies the orient...In Act Two, we discover the full impact of her role in the disruptive penetration of the orient into the company of the Grail knights.”<sup>305</sup> Hence, Wagner refashions Kundry into an exotic femme fatale.

Kundry’s first entrance in Act I marks her as an exotic character. Kundry’s first entrance is heralded by a strikingly dissonant chord, interrupting the tonal stability of the preceding music. As Glenn Stanley observes, “Early in Act I Kundry is swept onstage in a violent eruption that disturbs the placid melancholy of

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<sup>301</sup> Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 193.

<sup>302</sup> Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers,” 130.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>304</sup> Donald L. Hoffman, “Bearing the Grail,” *Arthuriana* 18.1 (2008): 90-91.

<sup>305</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *Retellings: The Bible in Literature, Music, Art, and Film* (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2007), 65-66.



the early morning in the forests of the Grail community.”<sup>306</sup> Thus, from the first moment of her entrance, Kundry is portrayed as a disruptive force, injecting a jarring element into the musical fabric—and, by extension, injecting a jarring element into the social fabric of the Grail community.

Not only does her music code her as disruptive, it also codes her as exotic—an exotic intruder, threatening the tightly-knit, homogenous community of knights. Her Leitmotif, accompanying her first entrance, is laced with augmented seconds, a standard marker of musical exoticism (ex. 49, Act I, scene 1).<sup>307</sup> Her leitmotif—a descending scalar figure that spans more than two octaves—is heavily chromatic, stamping her as an exotic figure who is not to be trusted. Chromaticism is a time-honored signifier of the evil foreigner. Susan McClary points out that in Bizet’s *Carmen*, for instance, “melodic chromaticism signifies the ‘Orient,’ Carmen’s beguiling treachery and perhaps also, by extension, the latent treachery of the Orient.”<sup>308</sup> Jeremy Day-O’Connell similarly argues that “the musical duality of pentatonicism versus chromaticism correlates with the exoticist duality identified by Ralph P. Locke as ‘sentimental-pastoral’ versus ‘diabolical and threatening.’”<sup>309</sup> Drawing on the diabolical connotations of chromaticism, Wagner gives Kundry a leitmotif that drips with chromaticism—signaling that she is up to no good!

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<sup>306</sup> Glenn Stanley, “Parsifal: Redemption and Kunstreligion,” *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 160.

<sup>307</sup> Many French composers, including Debussy, made use of augmented seconds in their clearly marked exotic pieces. In fact, Debussy’s *Habaneras* include augmented seconds. I have not spent much time in this dissertation discussing augmented seconds, since Debussy did not absorb this particular marker into his musical language. He used it only occasionally, for exotic effect.

<sup>308</sup> Susan McClary, *Carmen*, 56.

<sup>309</sup> Day-O’Connell, *Pentatonicism*, 92.

**KUNDRY.**

*Lebhaft.*  
(unruhig und heftig am Boden sich bewegend.)  
(moving restlessly and vehemently on the ground.)

Nicht Dank! Ha ha!\_ Was wird es  
Not thanks! Ha ha!\_What will it

es sei aus Dank für dei-ne Treu-e.  
let this be thanks for thy de - vo - tion.

*Lebhaft.*

hel - fen!\_ Nicht Dank! Fort, fort\_ in's Bad!  
help thee?\_ Not thanks! Off, off, thy bath!

*rall.*

Example 49. Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act I, scene 1 (1882)

Kundry's exotic leitmotif recurs many times throughout the course of Act I. Even when she is briefly mentioned by another character, her leitmotif is heard. For instance, when Gurnemanz, referring to Kundry, sings "There lies the rover wild," her leitmotif is heard. Several minutes later, a knight sings "And with her magic balm, look thou, ere long the master wholly she'll ruin," her leitmotif is again heard in the orchestra. By stating her leitmotif every time she is mentioned, Wagner creates a strong association between her and the exotic motive. The listener is thus conditioned to perceive Kundry as exotic.

Surprisingly, though, her leitmotif almost disappears in Act II, although she is the main protagonist of this act. Why is her exoticism heavily marked in the first

act, but not in the second? In order to answer this complex question, which no other scholar has addressed, let's have a look at the setting of each act. Act I takes place in the world of the Grail—a world in which Kundry is an exotic foreigner, indeed even an intruder. Thus, within this world she is musically represented as exotic, to reflect her outsider status. In Act II, however, Kundry is in Klingsor's magic castle. Everyone in this castle (Klingsor, Kundry, and the flower maidens) is exotic; thus, Kundry blends into this world, and is not marked as a foreigner. She is on her own home turf. In Act II, then, Kundry's Leitmotif—which marked her as an exotic outsider in the first act—largely disappears from the musical score.

Her Leitmotif does, however, reappear at a pivotal moment in Act II: the moment in which Parsifal rejects Kundry's advances. At this moment, Parsifal pushes Kundry away and cries out for Amfortas and the grail community: here, her leitmotif is heard twice in the orchestra. Parsifal's reference to the grail community—a world to which Kundry does not belong—once again marks her as an exotic outsider (ex. 50, Act II, end of scene 2). Thus, when Parsifal refers to Amfortas and the grail, Kundry's exoticized Leitmotif is heard several times. Several measures later, Parsifal refers again to Amfortas, singing "Wretched one! Plight most woeful!" Here, again, Kundry's leitmotif is heard, alluding to the dangerous exoticism that Parsifal must reject in order to save Amfortas. Later in the same scene, the grail motive is heard as Parsifal sings "My gaze is fixed now on the Holy Cup." Here, the grail motive symbolizes Parsifal's steadfast devotion to Christianity. It signifies his determination to resist Kundry's seductive, exotic lure.

Am-for - tas! - Die Wun -  
Am-for - tas! - The spear.

Schnell.  
ff

P. +

- - de!  
- wound!

die Wun - - de!  
The spear - wound!

P. 1 3 +

Example 50. Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act II, scene 2 (1882)

A few measures later, Kundry's motive is again heard, reminding the listener of the exotic world that Parsifal is repudiating.

But Parsifal is not the only character who repudiates exoticism; Kundry herself repudiates exoticism in Act III, assimilating herself into the grail community and trading in her exotic identity for a wholesome, Christian identity. She is thus redeemed, converting to Christianity and atoning for her sins. Her atonement through death is vividly depicted in the end of Act III, in which, to quote Wagner's stage directions, "Kundry, with her gaze uplifted to Parsifal, sinks slowly lifeless to the ground." Her exotic leitmotif is not heard in this scene, because she has ceased to be an exotic femme fatale. She is now a penitent, humbly accepting her death. As she dies, the music becomes radiantly diatonic and blissfully consonant (ex. 51,

Act III, final scene); gone is the restless chromaticism of her earlier music. The idyllic, serene beauty of her death music reflects Schopenhauer's influence. As we saw above, Schopenhauer believes that death frees humans from their suffering, calming the restless will. In true Schopenhauerian form, the music becomes calm and restful at the moment of Kundry's death, indicating that Kundry has transcended the suffering associated with the physical world.

ser!  
er!  
Kundry sinkt, mit dem Blicke zu ihm auf, langsam vor  
Kundry, with her gaze uplifted to Parsifal, sinks

*cresc.*

P

Parsifal entseelt zu Boden. Amfortas und Gurnemanz huldigen kniend Parsifal, welcher den Gral segnend über die anbetende Ritterschaft schwingt.)  
slowly lifeless to the ground. — Amfortas and Gurnemanz kneel in homage before Parsifal, who waves the Grail in blessing over the worshipping Knighthood.)

*f* *dim.* *p* *più p*

P P P

(Der Bühnenvorhang wird langsam geschlossen.)  
(The Curtain slowly closes.)

*sempre p*

P

Example 51. Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act III, final scene (1882)

In sum, through creating two contrasting musical worlds in *Parsifal*—the metaphysical world of the Grail and the physical, exotic world of Kundry and Klingsor—Wagner musically portrays a dichotomy between metaphysics and exoticism. In Nietzsche’s *Case of Wagner*, he sets up the same dichotomy between metaphysics and exoticism. But he reverses the value of each term. Whereas Wagner portrays metaphysics positively, and exoticism negatively, Nietzsche does the opposite. Thus, he takes Wagner’s dichotomy and reverses the hierarchy, inverting Wagner’s value system. This is a clever move that undoes Wagner’s metaphysical philosophy, replacing it with a set of body-positive values.

***Debussy and Nietzsche:  
Parallels and Resonances***

Debussy and Nietzsche laid many of the same charges at Wagner’s door. We have seen that Nietzsche accuses Wagner of nihilism, bombast, and pretentiousness. For instance, Nietzsche writes, “that Wagner prefers “that which is great, sublime, gigantic—that which moves *masses*? Once more: it is easier to be gigantic than to be beautiful; we know that.” Here, he is implying that Wagner cultivates the appearance of “sublimity” in order to overwhelm and impress the spectator. Several paragraphs later, he sarcastically paraphrases what he perceives as Wagner’s aesthetic stance: “To elevate men one has to be sublime oneself. Let us walk on clouds, let us harangue the infinite, let us surround ourselves with symbols!”<sup>310</sup> Here, Nietzsche suggests that Wagner decks himself out in sublime,

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<sup>310</sup> Nietzsche, “Case of Wagner,” 624.

metaphysical trappings. These trappings, he implies, are fake and bombastic: “Open your ears: everything that ever grew on the soil of *impoverished* life, all of the counterfeiting of transcendence and beyond, has found its most sublime advocate in Wagner’s art.”<sup>311</sup> Here, his use of the word “counterfeiting” suggests that he views Wagnerian metaphysics as a sham.

Scholars have not addressed the numerous links between Debussy and Nietzsche,<sup>312</sup> but I argue that these passages resonate with many of Debussy’s own polemical remarks about Wagnerian opera. Like Nietzsche, Debussy accused Wagnerian opera of counterfeiting transcendence. Implying that Germanic (read: Wagnerian) metaphysics is fraudulent and pseudo-profound, Debussy writes: “There’s too much German influence in France and we’re still suffocated by it. Don’t you go the same way, don’t let yourselves be taken in by false profundity and the detestable German ‘modernstyl.’”<sup>313</sup> Debussy’s reference to Wagner’s “false profundity” echoes Nietzsche’s polemic against Wagner’s “counterfeiting of transcendence.” Thus, both Nietzsche and Debussy are attacking Wagnerian metaphysics as a counterfeit, a sham.

With regard to Wagnerian metaphysics, Debussy wrote, in a 1906 letter to his friend Laloy, “I’m delighted about your enthusiasm for Rameau. He deserves it for all the qualities in his music which ought to have protected us against...Wagner’s bombastic metaphysics....We continue, like vain children, to ignore the perfect

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 639.

<sup>312</sup> Robin Holloway identifies a few superficial parallels between Debussy and Nietzsche, but he neglects to discuss the most important parallel--their shared antipathy toward Wagnerian metaphysics. Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1979), 15-21.

<sup>313</sup> *Debussy Letters*, trans. Roger Nicholas, 233.

taste and strict elegance which make up the consummate beauty of Rameau's music."<sup>314</sup> In this passage, Debussy is contrasting the tasteful elegance of Latinate classicism to the noisy pomp of Wagnerian bombast. Eighteen years earlier, Nietzsche had made a similar move when he wrote that Bizet's Latinate music "approaches lightly, supplely, politely. It is pleasant, it does not *sweat*...[it is] without grimaces. Without counterfeit. Without the *lie* of the great style."<sup>315</sup> Hence, both Debussy and Nietzsche privilege the delicate elegance of French music over the (in their view) bombastic, pseudo-sublime works of Wagner.

What do Nietzsche and Debussy mean when they refer to Wagner's phony metaphysics? What is "false" about Wagnerian metaphysics? In his 2002 study *Reading Opera Between the Lines*, Christopher Morris astutely suggests that, for Nietzsche (Morris does not mention Debussy), Wagner "hollows out (polarizes) a 'healthy' musical sensuality to become pathologically oriented effect clothed in the trappings of the sublime."<sup>316</sup> As Morris argues, Wagnerian opera conceals its sensuality behind a metaphysical mask. To understand what Morris is getting at, we must think back to *Tristan und Isolde*, discussed earlier in this chapter. The ecstatic love duet in Act II features highly erotic music—and words. But Wagner couches this eroticism in Schopenhauerian terms as the lovers' longing for death, rather than their desire for physical satisfaction. Thus, Nietzsche and Debussy are perhaps criticizing Wagner for clothing his operas in metaphysical garb in order to conceal their corporeal eroticism.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>315</sup> Nietzsche, *Case of Wagner*, 613.

<sup>316</sup> Christopher Morris, *Reading Opera Between the Lines: Orchestral Interludes and Cultural Meaning from Wagner to Berg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 184.



In brief: Nietzsche and Debussy both accused Wagnerian opera of “faking it.” Another striking parallel between Debussy and Nietzsche is their shared view of Wagner as an end, not a beginning. In *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, Nietzsche writes “Perhaps our latest music, too [Wagnerian opera], however dominant and domineering it is, has but a short span of time ahead of it: for it developed out of a culture whose soil is rapidly sinking—a culture which will soon have sunk out of sight.”<sup>317</sup> Nietzsche is arguing that Wagner’s music embodies the diseased spirit of a declining culture; for Nietzsche, Wagnerian music (and the culture that produced and supports it) has no future, it is doomed to decay into obscurity. To underscore his claim that Wagnerian opera lacks futurity, Nietzsche adds, “the current situation in Europe may indeed help an art such as Wagner’s to a sudden glory, without thereby guaranteeing it a future. The Germans themselves have no future.”<sup>318</sup> Like Nietzsche, Debussy asserts that Wagnerian opera has no future. In a strikingly Nietzschean passage, Debussy wrote in 1903, “Wagnerian opera is a beautiful sunset that has been mistaken for a sunrise.”<sup>319</sup> Thus, both Nietzsche and Debussy view Wagnerian opera as the art of the past, not the art of the future.

Yet another similarity between Nietzsche and Debussy consists in their view of Wagner as poisonous. In *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche describes Wagner (and his operas) as a disease: “Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn’t he rather a sickness? He makes sick whatever he touches—*he has made music sick*.”<sup>320</sup> Nietzsche

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<sup>317</sup> Nietzsche, “Nietzsche Contra Wagner,” 607-608.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Quoted in Deirdre Donnelon, “Debussy as Musician and Critic,” *Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Deborah Mawer. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 46.

<sup>320</sup> Nietzsche, *Case of Wagner*, 620.

implies that Wagnerian opera is thoroughly contaminated by toxins—he even suggests that Wagnerian opera is nothing *but* a toxic waste dump. Along strikingly similar lines, Debussy too viewed Wagner as poisonous. In an 1896 letter (several years after the French translation of *Case of Wagner*), Debussy criticizes the composer Houston Stewart Chamberlain for having fallen under Wagner’s dangerous spell: “He [Chamberlain] is still at the Wagner stage too (can you imagine?) and believes in the recipes propounded by that old poisoner!”<sup>321</sup> Thus, Debussy and Nietzsche share the same opinion of Wagner: both of them view him as a poisonous, pernicious influence.

As we will discover in the next section, Nietzsche’s writings on music, especially the *Case of Wagner*, had a profound effect on French musical culture. Thus, I argue that Debussy modeled his reaction against Wagner on Nietzsche’s polemic.

### ***Nietzsche’s Influence on French Musical Nationalism***

As we have seen, Nietzsche was a warm admirer of French culture—especially French music. It is thus no wonder that his writings found a readily appreciative audience in turn-of-the-century France, at a time when nationalism was shaping the tastes and interests of many French intellectuals. Paradoxically, Nietzsche—a German philosopher—became a spokesman for French nationalism. It was a German who showed the French how to be more French. Many Frenchmen

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<sup>321</sup> *Debussy Letters*, trans. Roger Nicholas, 83.

regarded Nietzsche as one of their own, as an honorary Frenchman and fellow countryman.

Let us examine the way in which the French novelist and music critic Édouard Dujardin (1861-1949) viewed Nietzsche. An ardent Wagnerian in his youth, Dujardin co-founded a journal of Wagner studies, *La Revue Wagnérienne*. But Dujardin's youthful ardor for Wagner turned cold in later years, as did Nietzsche's. Becoming increasingly skeptical of the Wagnerian project, Dujardin wrote, "Wagner is fashionable, that is, neither loved nor understood."<sup>322</sup> He then added: "Times change. By a marvelous phenomenon, the German spirit denies itself in producing the great man who, though German, represents the pure classical French tradition: I mean Nietzsche."<sup>323</sup>

Dujardin explicitly figures Nietzsche as a Frenchman. Moreover, he links Nietzsche with French *classicism*, implicitly situating Nietzsche within the context of the revival of "classical" French masters such as Rameau. Nietzsche became, in the minds of many Frenchmen, a spokesman for French classicism and renewal. In 1904 the French philosopher Jules de Gautier argued that "We have to recognize that Nietzsche's thought is of a purely French inspiration and brings us back to ourselves."<sup>324</sup> Here, Gautier casts Nietzsche as an honorary Frenchman.

Gautier was not alone in this view, for the notion of Nietzsche as pro-French—and anti-German—was widespread in the French press. For instance, Nietzsche's

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<sup>322</sup> Quoted in Luca Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism, 1885-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 105.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Quoted in Ali Nematollahy, "Nietzsche in France 1890-1914," *The Philosophical Forum* 40:2 (2009): 172.

French translator Henri Albert claimed, in 1903, “After 1883, Nietzsche wrote for France. His connections to Germany were almost entirely severed.”<sup>325</sup> Similarly, in a 1903 issue of the French journal *Mercure de France*, Ugo Ojetti referred approvingly to Nietzsche’s anti-German sentiment: “Goethe, Heine, Nietzsche sont admirables parce qu’ils se sont opposés à leur propre milieu, qu’ils se sont sentis ou déclarés, dans le sens intellectuel au moins, antiallemands.”<sup>326</sup> Indeed, the *Mercure de France* was a prominent advocate of Nietzsche’s works. The 1903 edition of this journal contains a full-page advertisement for the French translation of Nietzsche’s complete works,<sup>327</sup> indicating the extent of Nietzsche’s popularity in French culture (illus. 1).

Many Frenchmen took a nationalistic pride in Nietzsche’s love of French culture. Specifically, a number of French music critics were flattered by Nietzsche’s admiration for Bizet; they were very pleased that Nietzsche thought so highly of a French composer, of one of their own. In the 1903 issue of the *Revue Musicale*, a music critic observes, proudly, that Bizet is being performed as frequently as Wagner; he observes that *Tannhäuser* has been performed 268 times in Germany in the past year, and *Lohengrin*. But, he observes proudly, “ce dernier chiffre est atteint également par notre *Carmen*: tressailez d’aise, mânes de

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ugo Ojetti, “Enquête sur l’Influence Allemande,” *Mercure de France* 45 (February 1903), 396. “Goethe, Heine, and Nietzsche are admirable because they are opposed to their own milieu, because they felt or declared themselves, at least in an intellectual sense, anti-German.” (Translation my own.)

<sup>327</sup> *Mercure de France* 45, (Janvier-Mars 1903).

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Illustration 1. Advertisement in 1903 *Mercure de France* for translation of Nietzsche's complete works.

Nietzsche! La gaieté ‘africaine’ de notre Bizet réchauffe l’Allemagne.”<sup>328</sup> Here, the music critic is pleased that a French opera, Bizet’s *Carmen*, is holding its own against Wagnerian opera.

***Il Faut Méditerraniser la Musique:  
The French Reception of Nietzsche’s Dictum***

As we have seen, anti-Wagnerism was a raging movement in France, especially in the wake of the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. In the throes of an impassioned reaction against Wagner, French musicians were highly receptive to Nietzsche’s anti-Wagnerian diatribes. The anti-Wagnerian climate in France offered fertile soil for Nietzsche’s ideas to take root and flourish. Moreover, the anti-Wagnerian antidote suggested by Nietzsche was one that French composers found extremely appealing and relevant to their own national traditions and proclivities. Nietzsche argued that French exoticism is capable of serving as a potent antidote to Wagnerian opera; this argument was deeply appealing and gratifying to French composers, for exoticism was already a thriving tradition in France and a source of national pride.

Thus, the tradition of exoticism—already a half-century long by the time that Nietzsche penned *Case of Wagner*—opened up a space within which Nietzsche’s thesis was enthusiastically received, for he offered composers a way to deploy their beloved national tradition of exoticism as a weapon against the hated Wagner. By enabling composers to channel the long-standing French tradition of exoticism into

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<sup>328</sup> “La Musique en Allemagne en 1902,” *Revue Musicale* (1903): 187. “This latter figure is equally attained by our *Carmen*: tremble in joy, ghost of Nietzsche! The ‘African’ gaiety of our Bizet warms Germany.” (Translation my own.)

a reaction against Wagner, Nietzsche imbued the French exotic tradition with a new urgency, allowing it to take on nationalistic connotations.

In his thorough study of Nietzsche's French reception, Christopher Forth observes that the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a steep rise in French nationalism.<sup>329</sup> Forth struggles to reconcile this surge in French nationalistic sentiments with a sudden increase of interest in Nietzsche: "Paradoxically, throughout this chauvinistic turn the thought of Nietzsche would gain even more currency, and by 1902 he would emerge as virtually the only notable foreign writer to be celebrated by French *littérateurs*, a curious phenomenon."<sup>330</sup> But Nietzsche's popularity in French nationalist circles is neither paradoxical nor curious, for he *was* a French nationalist (or, to put it more precisely, his pro-French writings on music invited readers to construct him as an honorary Frenchman). Because Forth is not focusing on French musical culture, but rather on literary culture, he does not address one of the most important strands of Nietzsche's influence in France. As I hope to show, it was in French musical circles that Nietzsche's influence was most keenly felt.

However, Nietzsche's love of Mediterranean exoticism made a strong impact in many French circles. In her 1929 study *Nietzsche en France*, Geneviève Bianquis argues that, for many fin-de-siècle French writers, "Nietzsche est le philosophe des paysages méditerranéens et lumineux... il manifeste la vitalité de l'esprit latin, la protestation du Midi contre la Nord... de l'esprit latin contre l'esprit

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<sup>329</sup> Forth, *Zarathustra in Paris*, 55.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.



germanique.”<sup>331</sup> According to Bianquis (an authoritative source on Nietzsche reception, because she was extremely active in French literary circles during the Nietzsche craze), many French writers were influenced by Nietzsche’s claim that Mediterranean culture was superior to German culture. As she argues, this claim was viewed in France as the most interesting, salient aspect of his philosophy.

Specifically, Nietzsche’s anti-Wagnerian dictum, “il faut méditerraniser la musique,” had a profound influence on French musical culture; Nietzsche sparked a “Latin Renaissance” in France, leading French composers to cultivate an anti-Germanic, Mediterranean sensibility to counter Wagner’s influence. The music periodicals of the time are replete with references to Nietzsche’s dictum and its impact on French musical life. For instance, in an article on the French reaction against German music, Lionel de La Laurencie wrote, “Les Allemands compliquent en élargissant; nous simplifions en condensant...Nous sommes en train de suivre le conseil de Nietzsche et de ‘méditerraniser’ la musique.”<sup>332</sup>

In a 1910 issue of the French journal *La Revue Musicale*, Henri Lichtenberger, like Laloy and de La Laurencie, asserted that Nietzsche was shaping French musical culture:

Nietzsche appelait de ses vœux l’avènement d’un art  
‘méditerranéen’ vibrant, passionné, et haut en couleurs, d’un art dont  
les couleurs ne pâlieraient pas devant le bleu de la Méditerranée ou

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<sup>331</sup> Geneviève Bianquis, *Nietzsche en France: L’Influence de Nietzsche sur la Pensée Française* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1929), 13-14. “Nietzsche is the philosopher of luminous Mediterranean landscapes...he shows the vitality of the latin spirit, the protestation of the south against the north, of the latin spirit against the German spirit.” (Translation my own.)

<sup>332</sup> Lionel de La Laurencie, “Enquête sur l’influence allemande,” *Mercure de France* XLV (1903): 101-102. “The Germans complicate by enlarging; we simplify by condensing....We [French composers] are in the process of following Nietzsche’s advice and ‘mediterraneanizing’ music.” (Translation my own.)



les tons fauves du désert. Et le succès de la *Habanera* de Laparra indique que l'on accepte aussi cette formule.<sup>333</sup>

Lichtenberger is arguing that Nietzsche's dictum had a profound influence on French musical taste; this dictum, he asserts, was responsible for the success of Raoul Laparra's 1908 opera *Habanera*, a Spanish-style (and thus Mediterranean) work featuring numerous dance scenes.

In a 1917 anthology of essays on French music (with a preface written by Debussy), P. Huvelin contributed an essay intriguingly entitled "French Music and German music: Wagner and Bizet Judged by Nietzsche." After detailing the main arguments in the *Case of Wagner*, Huvelin writes:

"Nietzsche then summarizes—in French—his precepts in these lapidary words: 'It is necessary to Mediterraneanize music.' A formula full of sense and substance, advice to meditate upon for all musicians—and even for German musicians, if they could follow it! But they cannot. It is in vain that Richard Strauss, for example, wants to obey the lesson of Nietzsche."<sup>334</sup>

Huvelin then goes on to argue that French musicians, unlike their German counterparts, *are* able to obey Nietzsche's lesson: "But our musicians of France should understand it and meditate on it, these liberatory words. Nietzsche was right. He shows us the way that opens before us. Our music...is the true flower of

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<sup>333</sup> Henri Lichtenberger, "Le Drame Lyrique Moderne," *La Revue Musicale* (January 1910): 26. "Nietzsche looked forward to the advent of a 'Mediterranean' art, vibrant, passionate, and highly colorful, an art whose colors do not pale before the blue of the Mediterranean or the tawny hues of the desert. And the success of Laparra's *Habanera* indicates that we also accept this formula." (Translation my own.)

<sup>334</sup> Nietzsche résume enfin—en français—ses precepts dans cette parole lapidaire: 'il faut méditerranéiser la musique.' Formule plein de sens et de suc, conseil à méditer pour tous les musiciens—et même pour les musiciens allemands, s'ils pouvaient le suivre! Mais ils n'y parviennent pas. C'est en vain que Richard Strauss, par exemple, veut obéir à la leçon de Nietzsche." P. Huvelin, "Musique Française et Musique Allemande: Wagner et Bizet Jugés par Nietzsche," *Pour la Musique Française: Douze Causeries* (Paris: Editions Georges Cres et Compagnie, 1917), 26. (Translation my own.)

Greco-Latin humanism.”<sup>335</sup>

Huvelin is arguing that Nietzsche’s dictum offers valuable advice—advice that the Germans are unable to follow, for Latinate, Mediterranean sensibilities run counter to their true nature. But if Nietzsche’s advice is incompatible with the German spirit, it is (for Huvelin) fully compatible with the French national spirit, because France has strong ties to Latin, Greek, and Mediterranean traditions. Huvelin argues that Nietzsche’s dictum shows French composers how to tap into their Mediterranean heritage as a source of inspiration—and, in so doing, how to find their musical voice and express the Latin soul of their country.

This is exactly what many French composers did. They embraced their Mediterranean, Latin roots and cultivated a “Mediterranean” musical style, following Nietzsche’s advice to “Mediterranize” music. The French composer Déodat de Séverac (1872-1921), for instance, asserted, in a letter to a friend, that his music was based on a non-Wagnerian, “Mediterranean” style: “You also ask if I intend to ‘Wagnerize’ my work. My intentions are quite simply to compose the music that comes to me...but I strongly doubt that I will ever be able to work in the German style! I was born far too close to the beautiful Mediterranean to be able to succeed at writing German music.”<sup>336</sup>

De Séverac was enormously proud of his Mediterranean heritage, and he believed that Mediterranean music was vastly superior to German music: “The very

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<sup>335</sup> “Mais nos musiciens de France doivent l’entendre et la méditer, la parole libératrice. Nietzsche a raison. Il leur montre la voie qui s’ouvre. Notre musique...est la vraie fleur de l’humanisme Greco-latin.” Huvelin, “Musique Française,” 26. (Translation my own.)

<sup>336</sup> Quoted in Robert Waters, *Déodat de Séverac: Musical Identity in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Burlington: Ashgate, 1988), 31.

great German masters mean nothing to me...to my taste, the greatest Classical musicians are not ‘made in Germany.’ Palestrina, Monteverdi, and Rameau are, in their expressive power, Mediterranean....Nothing is less artistic than Wagnerian music...Germans cannot be artists...And let us not forget that every single one of our Mediterranean olive groves, which carry in their branches more true poetry, more elegance and beauty, than all of their Black Forests.”<sup>337</sup> French music critics of the time observed that De Séverac’s Mediterranean aesthetic was influenced by Nietzsche. Octave Maus, for instance, pointed out that “M. de Séverac appears to have appropriated the words of Nietzsche: ‘Il faut méditerraniser la musique.’”<sup>338</sup>

Albéric Magnard (1865-1914) was identified as another French composer who followed Nietzsche’s precepts. In 1901, a music critic for *Le Guide Musical* argued that:

I have the impression that, in the second and third symphonies, Magnard has made considerable progress toward simplicity, force, and clarity. ‘It is necessary to mediterraneanize music,’ said Nietzsche some time ago, opposing the simple, luminous, plastic, beautiful forms of French and Greek classical art to the erudite complexity of the ‘decadent’ art of our neo-Romantic epoch. Well, the new symphony by Magnard incontestably represents an effort—successful, in my opinion, to continue the French classical tradition.”<sup>339</sup>

This article figures Magnard’s symphonies as a Nietzschean attempt to restore

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>338</sup> “M. de Séverac paraît s’être approprié la parole de Nietzsche: ‘Il faut méditerraniser la musique.’” Octave Maus, “La Musique a la Libre Esthétique,” *L’Art Moderne* (7 April 1901): 124. (Translation my own.)

<sup>339</sup> “J’ai d’ailleurs l’impression que, de la *Deuxième Symphonie* à la *Troisième*, M. Magnard a fait un progrès considérable vers la simplicité, la force et la clarté. ‘Il faut méditerraniser la musique’ disait naguère Nietzsche en opposant la belle forme simple, lumineuse et plastique de l’art ‘classique’ des Grecs ou des Français à la complexité savante de l’art ‘décadent’ de notre époque neo-romantique. Or, la nouvelle symphonie de M. Magnard représente incontestablement un effort, à mon sens heureux, pour continuer la tradition classique et française.” H.L., “Nancy,” *Le Guide Musical* 47 (1901): 282. (Translation my own.)

classical purity to French art and counter the influence of German Romanticism—in other words, an attempt to Mediterraneanize music.

### *Nietzsche's Influence on Fin-de-Siècle Music Criticism in France*

Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner* influenced the vocabulary of music criticism in France. Nietzsche was (as far as I know) the first writer to apply the term "Mediterranean" to music, and many French music critics followed suit; the adjective "Mediterranean" quickly became part of the lexicon of French musical criticism. As early as 1904, the term was already finding its way into music criticism; for instance, in a concert review in the French periodical *Revue Musicale*, Romain Rolland described Berlioz's *Enfance du Christ* as "the Mediterranean music of Nietzsche."<sup>340</sup> In the same year, Nietzsche was referenced in an obituary for the Spanish composer Isaac Albeniz. Henri Collet, the author of the obituary, argued that Albeniz "would have enchanted Nietzsche, who dreamed of a Mediterranean art of which *Carmen* appeared to him to be a preliminary sketch."<sup>341</sup> In the following year, Nietzschean terminology surfaced yet again in a music journal. While reviewing a performance of Monteverdi's *Poppea*, H. de C. praises Monteverdi's music: "How delicate and simple this music is! No polyphonic

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<sup>340</sup> "La musique méditerranéenne de Nietzsche." Romain Rolland, "Concerts Colonne," *Revue Musicale* (1904): 19.

<sup>341</sup> "...qui eut enchanté Nietzsche, qui rêva d'un art méditerranéen dont *Carmen* lui parut être l'ébauche." Henri Collet, "Nécrologie," *Bulletin Français de la S.I.M.* (1904): 717. (Translation my own.)

complexity...It is, to speak like Nietzsche, ‘Mediterranean’ music.”<sup>342</sup>

The adjective “Mediterranean” continued to carry descriptive force well into the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1909, Julien Tiersot asserted that the second act of Gluck’s *Alceste* was “Mediterranean music, as Nietzsche would have expressed it.”<sup>343</sup> Tiersot’s claim contrasts sharply with Debussy’s 1903 remarks about Gluck (cited on page 5). Tiersot views Gluck as a member of the home team (the French/Mediterranean team). But Debussy considered Gluck’s musical style to be German (indeed, even proto-Wagnerian) rather than French/Mediterranean. These two conflicting views of Gluck are emblematic of the national crisis that France was undergoing. France was seeking to define itself in opposition to Germany. Throughout this process of national definition and redefinition, the lines between “them” and “us” were constantly being drawn and redrawn. Boundaries were unstable, and music critics were attempting to shore up these boundaries by dividing musical works into two polarized categories: “Mediterranean” and “Wagnerian.”

These categories, carrying a great deal of nationalistic weight, persisted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, Nietzsche’s notion of Mediterranean music was even cited in the authoritative *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire de Conservatoire*, in a 1920 article on medieval Spanish music: “The second [medieval Spanish song] is frankly passionate, southern, *Mediterranean*, as Nietzsche would

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<sup>342</sup> “Comme cette musique est délicate et simple! Aucune complexité polyphonique...C’est, pour parler comme Nietzsche, de la musique ‘méditerranéenne.’” H. de C., “Société Philharmonique,” *Le Guide Musical* 51 (1905): 237. (Translation my own.)

<sup>343</sup> “C’est...de la musique méditerranéenne, comme s’exprime Nietzsche.” Julien Tiersot, “Soixante Ans de la Vie de Gluck,” *Le Ménestrel* 75:3 (Samedi 16 Janvier 1909): 18. (Translation my own.)

have said.”<sup>344</sup> Here, Nietzsche’s ideas are retroactively applied to a much earlier musical repertoire, in order to create a sense of a Mediterranean tradition extending throughout a long period of music history. The same move takes place in the above-cited remark by Tiersot about Gluck, in which he considers *Alceste* (1767) to be a Nietzschean work. Tiersot is applying Nietzsche’s musical categories to past repertoire. Therefore, Nietzsche’s dictum did not only shape views of contemporary French music. It also shaped the way in which music history was viewed. As we can see in all the above quotations, Nietzsche’s notion of Mediterranean music became absorbed into French journalism and musicology. It functioned as an important descriptive category.

### *Nietzsche and Spanish Exoticism*

Nietzsche’s dictum contributed to French composers’ obsession with Spain. *Carmen*, the opera that Nietzsche touted as a model for French composers, is (as we have seen) set in Spain and makes heavy use of Spanish-flavored, Mediterranean-style music. Influenced by Nietzsche’s view of *Carmen* as an antidote to Wagner, many French composers reacted against Wagner by embracing Spanish exoticism.

To be sure, the French exotic tradition was underway well before Nietzsche. Indeed, the French exotic vocabulary predates *Case of Wagner* by forty years. But Nietzsche endowed this vocabulary with a new meaning. He transformed musical markers of exoticism into weapons in the battle against Wagner. He showed French

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<sup>344</sup> “La seconde est franchement passionnée, méridionale, *méditerranéenne*, comme dirait Nietzsche.” Rafael Mitjana, “La Musique en Espagne: Art Religieux et Art Profane,” *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire de Conservatoire*, ed. Albert Lavignac and Lionel de la Laurencie (Paris: Librairie Delagrave, 1920), 1942. (Translation my own.)

composers that their exotic tradition, already firmly established in French culture, could be more than a mere tradition: it could be a strategy of resistance against Wagner. It could form the basis of a French musical identity defined in opposition to Wagner. Seen in this light, Nietzsche's popularity makes perfect sense. At a time when French composers were urgently seeking antidotes to Wagnerism (the 1890's), Nietzsche offered French composers a whole bag of tricks for resisting Wagner: the exotic toolkit that had been in their own backyards all along.

In a way, Nietzsche was continuing the project initiated by Felicien David some fifty years before. In 1844, David was instrumental in creating a set of exotic tropes. Nietzsche was instrumental in turning these tropes into symbols of anti-Wagnerian nationalism. The tropes lent themselves well to this form of nationalism, for the tropes had always carried some degree of nationalistic meaning, even in the time of Felicien David. The exotic tropes had long been symbols of French colonial power, for they evoked the non-Western world in which France had many colonies. Thus, the tropes, already imbued with an imperialistic form of nationalism, took on an additional meaning as symbols of anti-Wagnerian nationalism.

Owing to Nietzsche's influence, *Carmen* became an emblem of anti-Wagnerian Frenchness, as Darius Milhaud pointed out:

"I am not to censure Wagner. He is and will always remain a formidable musician...But, on the other hand, certain temperaments could not accept that form of thought. And in the face of this great clamor (where the noise of steel resounds in a foggy landscape) where the most abstract ideas express themselves in a philosophical dialectic, we have seen a Latin heart arise, bright and pure, with the breeze of the Mediterranean and the soft and perfect shape of our

southern highlands, and all our hearts turned to him: Georges Bizet. I will not endeavor to speak here of the total shaking up *Carmen* brought to Nietzsche, heretofore a passionate disciple of the Wagnerian art.”<sup>345</sup>

Louis Laloy, a keen observer of the French musical scene, observed in 1908 that “Spain exerts a singular attraction on our composers today: in the same way as Nietzsche by the ‘African’ *Carmen*, they feel themselves seduced by a burning sky, an expansive melody, dominating rhythms.”<sup>346</sup>

This attraction stemmed from a Nietzschean view of Spain as the sunny antithesis of German bombast. Samuel Llano has explored the ways in which French music critics constructed this image of Spain: “They construed Spain as an allied, Latin and anti-German culture, and imbued their descriptions of Hispanic music with a marked anti-Teutonic character.”<sup>347</sup> Llano believes that “a compelling contradiction arose in their writings, therefore, between images of Spain as a powerful ally in the fight against German culture, and subaltern constructions of Spanish identity.”<sup>348</sup> In my opinion, this apparent contradiction is resolved when we realize that French musicians did not necessarily view the *actual* Spain as an ally against Germany. It was the *French* construction of Spain—as epitomized in Bizet’s *Carmen*—that emerged as the touchstone for anti-German sentiment.

In fact, Henri Collet, in a 1909 article, attributed the Spanish composer Albeniz’s “Mediterranean” style to his study of French music:

Through that contact with France, [Albeniz] also gained a fluent grace, a clear

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<sup>345</sup> Darius Milhaud, “The Evolution of Modern Music in Paris and in Vienna,” *North American Review* 217:809 (April 1923): 547.

<sup>346</sup> Laloy, *Louis Laloy on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky*, 254.

<sup>347</sup> Llano, *Whose Spain*, 5.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.



ardour, a nervous precision, which make him rather precious in the eyes of every true musician, and which would have charmed Nietzsche, who dreamt of a Mediterranean art of which *Carmen* seemed to him to be the preliminary sketch.<sup>349</sup>

Here, as Llano points out, “Collet played with prevailing notions of the ‘Mediterranean’ as being opposed to Nordic and German culture.”<sup>350</sup> But Collet is also implying that Spanish composers are most successful when they draw upon French musical markers of Spanishness. Thus, Collet portrays Albeniz as anti-German and pro-French. This portrayal hinges on a Nietzschean dichotomy between Mediterranean and Germanic musical styles.

### ***Exotic Tropes and Exotic Troops: The War Against Germany***

As mentioned above, Nietzsche urged French composers to use exotic tropes as a weapon against Germany. In a striking parallel between music and politics, this use of exotic tropes mirrors the situation on the French battlefield. Beginning in the 1870s, France used colonial subjects as soldiers to fight against German invasions. Richard Fogarty writes, “France had a long tradition of risking what other powers would not, making soldiers of conquered peoples and deploying them against white enemies....Algerian troops fought in France itself during the [Franco-Prussian] war of 1870. From the earliest weeks of the Great War, North and West African

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

soldiers took part in the desperate attempts to stop the invading Germans.”<sup>351</sup> In other words, the French empire was using exotic troops to fight against German invasion.

French composers, responding to Nietzsche’s dictum, mirrored this situation in their music. They used exotic *tropes* to fight against German musical invasion. By metaphorically enacting the battlefield scene, French composers such as Debussy played out political conflicts in the realm of music. Nietzsche gave them the means to do so, for he urged French composers to take up arms against Germany using their own toolkit of exotic tropes. In doing so, French composers could flaunt their imperial power, which was vastly superior to that of Germany. In fact, France hugely expanded its empire in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; as Le Vine notes, “[b]y 1900 those conquests [mainly in Africa] had made France the second largest colonial power of the day.”<sup>352</sup> By lacing their music with exotic tropes, French composers created a musical analogue of their colonial supremacy over Germany. The exotic tropes were thus marshaled to serve as troops on a figurative musical battleground.

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<sup>351</sup> Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>352</sup> Victor T. Le Vine, *Politics in Francophone Africa* (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 36.

## Chapter Four

### *Debussy's Nietzschean Music*

Many of Debussy's works engage with Wagner in direct and indirect ways. I hope to show that the terms of this engagement were shaped by Nietzsche's dictum and by French musical culture in general. We must examine how exoticism, nationalism and anti-Wagnerism—the three strands that form the basis of my project—work together in Debussy's music. For a striking example of how these strands interact with and inform one another, I turn now to one of Debussy's most direct confrontations with Wagner's legacy: the piano piece *Golliwogg's Cakewalk* from *Children's Corner* (1908). This piece is a sprightly, up-tempo number in ragtime style, which includes a quotation from *Tristan and Isolde*. Scholars such as Lawrence Kramer and Davidia Caddy view this quotation as a “send-up” of Wagner without probing its deeper implications.<sup>353</sup> But we should ask: what is at stake when Debussy cites Wagner's metaphysical magnum opus in the seemingly frivolous context of a cakewalk? A cakewalk is a type of dance associated with African-American ragtime, and, as Paul Roberts has noted, it is “thought to convey the flavor of black America.”<sup>354</sup> What does Wagner have to do with the African-American genre of the cakewalk?

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<sup>353</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Davinia Caddy, “Parisian Cake Walks,” *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 30:3 (2007): 288-317.

<sup>354</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1996), 214-215.

The first section makes liberal use of syncopated African-American rhythms. It also draws on the relatively simple harmonic language of ragtime (ex. 52, *Golliwog's Cakewalk*, mm. 1-14), since its harmonies consist mostly of a tonic pedal alternating with other diatonic chords. In measures 10 and 11, however, the

## VI. Golliwogg's Cake-walk

The musical score for 'Golliwogg's Cakewalk' by Claude Debussy, measures 1-14, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) is marked 'Allegro giusto' and features a piano accompaniment with a tonic pedal in the left hand and syncopated rhythms in the right hand. The dynamics are *f*, *f*, *più f*, and *sf*. The second system (measures 5-8) starts with a measure rest in the right hand, followed by a piano accompaniment with a tonic pedal in the left hand and syncopated rhythms in the right hand. The dynamics are *p*, *f*, *p*, *f*, and *pp*. The third system (measures 9-14) starts with a measure rest in the right hand, followed by a piano accompaniment with a tonic pedal in the left hand and syncopated rhythms in the right hand. The dynamics are *mf*, *sf*, and *p*. Measure 10 is marked 'très net et très sec'.

Example 52. Claude Debussy, *Golliwogg's Cakewalk* (1908) mm. 1-14

harmonies become more complex with the introduction of a half-diminished ii7 chord. This chord perhaps foreshadows the surprising occurrence in the middle section, in which Debussy cites the first three measures of the prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. This section, marked "Avec une grande émotion," oozes with

sentimentality. The Wagnerian quotation is presented with tongue-in-cheek bombast: Debussy laces Wagner's phrase with exaggerated dynamics, indicating a grand swell as the melody rises (ex. 53, *Golliwog's Cakewalk*, mm. 58-77). He punctuates each statement with a series of chuckling chords (mm. 63-64 and 67-68),

The musical score for Example 53, Claude Debussy's *Golliwog's Cakewalk* (1908), measures 58-77, is presented in four systems. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes various dynamic markings and performance instructions.

- System 1 (Measures 58-62):** Starts with a piano (*p*) section marked "Cédez *p avec une grande émotion*". The melody in the right hand features a grand swell. The left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment.
- System 2 (Measures 63-67):** Marked "a Tempo". It features a series of chuckling chords in the left hand, indicated by "without pedal". The right hand has a melodic line with a crescendo leading to a piano (*pp*) section marked "Cédez".
- System 3 (Measures 68-72):** Continues the "a Tempo" section. It includes a crescendo from *mf* to *f* in the right hand, followed by a piano (*p*) section marked "Cédez".
- System 4 (Measures 73-77):** Features a piano (*p*) section marked "Cédez", followed by a piano (*pp*) section marked "a Tempo", and ends with a piano (*p*) section marked "Cédez".

Example 53. Claude Debussy, *Golliwog's Cakewalk* (1908) mm. 58-77

as if to represent the sound of laughter. These chords bear some relation to the Tristan chord. However, the actual statement of the Tristan melody is not accompanied by the Tristan chord. Wagner's melodic phrase is thus divested of one of its most distinctive features, the famed Tristan chord.

But Wagner's phrase is not only robbed of its feverish chromatic harmonies. It is also robbed of its original *context*. In context, the first three measures of the *Tristan* prelude are (as we have seen) deeply sublime, setting the stage for a four-hour exploration of the metaphysics of the human will. But Debussy tears Wagner's phrase from its transcendent context, strips it of its sublimely dissonant harmonies, and incorporates it into a cakewalk. Why? I would argue that Debussy juxtaposes *Tristan und Isolde* with the cakewalk in order to ridicule Wagner's metaphysical aesthetics. We have seen that Nietzsche opposes Wagnerian metaphysics to the physicality of exotic dance. I contend that Debussy adopts the same strategy, countering Wagnerian metaphysics with exotic dance in *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*.

The outer sections of *Golliwogg's Cakewalk* paint a vivid portrait of the black doll, and of African-American culture in general (as perceived through the 'otherizing' lens of a Parisian composer). In these sections, Debussy makes heavy use of syncopated ragtime rhythms, which were fetishized in France as a symbol of the exciting foreignness of America—especially black America. As Lawrence Kramer, Glenn Watkins, and Gunter Schuller argue, the cakewalk (and ragtime in general) were signifiers of exoticism and primitivism in turn-of-the-century

France.<sup>355</sup> For instance, a 1902 French article referred to the cakewalk as “a dance of savages” accompanied by “the music of savages”.<sup>356</sup> This “savagery” was embraced by Parisians: as Davinia Caddy has documented, cakewalks were a popular form of entertainment in French music halls, circuses, and even salons.<sup>357</sup>

The Golliwogg doll was also enormously popular in turn-of-the-century France. A black (hence racially other) rag doll, the Golliwogg was a cherished cultural icon, found in nearly every nursery and figuring prominently in the children’s stories of Florence Upton.<sup>358</sup> It was associated with renewal and rejuvenation, as Marilynn Olson argues: “In response to the belief that mainstream European art was decadent and failing and that vital energy must be found elsewhere, many changes in literature, music, and art were attempted, especially those that sought to go outside what artists perceived to be established European modes...it is tempting to wonder whether the Golliwogg’s extremely energetic style, inventiveness, and capacity for hard work reflect this sense that the future was coming from outside European culture.”<sup>359</sup>

*Golliwogg’s Cakewalk* does indeed reflect this sense. The ragtime sections of this work—the outer sections—are energetic and vigorous, reflecting the link of primitivism with vitality. The Wagnerian section, on the other hand, is slow and

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<sup>355</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 204; Glenn Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to the Postmodernists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 63-64; Gunter Schuller, “Jazz and Musical Exoticism,” *The Exotic in Western Music* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 281-291.

<sup>356</sup> Quoted in Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Appropriation in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900-1930* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 18.

<sup>357</sup> Caddy, “Parisian Cake Walks,” 289.

<sup>358</sup> Marilynn Olson, “Turn-of-the-Century Grotesque: The Uptons’ Golliwogg and Dolls in Context,” *Children’s Literature* 28 (2000): 73.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

languid, portraying the decadence of the overstimulated, exhausted European. Hence, Debussy counters Wagnerian decadence with the fresh primitivism of ragtime.

*Golliwogg's Cakewalk* is doubly primitive, for it evokes not only the exotic/primitive genre of the cakewalk, but also the “primitive” innocence of childhood: it belongs to the *Children's Corner* suite. Hence, Debussy links “primitive” black music with childhood innocence. Indeed, many turn-of-the-century composers linked African-Americans with children. Watkins notes that “What may have appeared as a confusion between the art of children, Western folk art, and the art of black cultures was in effect the result of an attempt to provide a new orientation.”<sup>360</sup> This new orientation is centered upon the noble savage, in its many incarnations (child, African-American, peasant).<sup>361</sup> Children (especially in *Jimbo's Lullaby*, which quotes a children's lullaby tune) and African-Americans (in *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*) figure prominently in the *Children's Corner* suite. Peasants, too, make an appearance in this primitivist suite: the penultimate movement is entitled *The Little Shepherd*, underscoring the sense of innocence and folklike simplicity that pervades this six-movement suite. Adding to the exoticism and primitivism of the suite, each of the six movements has an English-language title. This suggests that not only *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*, but perhaps *Children's Corner* as a whole, is intended as an evocation of America, a country which many Frenchmen perceived as primitive, backward, unsophisticated—and exotic.

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<sup>360</sup> Watkins, *Pyramids*, 75.

<sup>361</sup> Significantly, the notion of the “noble savage” can be traced back to the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau; hence, the valorization of the primitive has been part of French culture since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



Perhaps Debussy is suggesting that the exotic and the primitive (as embodied in the African-American Golliwogg doll) are sources of cultural renewal—a revitalizing alternative to Wagner’s overwrought sublimity. Many early 20<sup>th</sup>-century European artists perceived primitivism as a source of fresh energy, a way of revitalizing ossified Western forms. As Charles Harrison observes, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century “more positive views of the essential purity and goodness of ‘primitive’ life, by contrast with the decadence of over-civilized Western societies, were gaining ground within European culture.”<sup>362</sup>

In *Golliwogg*, the primitivist, exotic outer sections frame the contrasting middle section, in which Debussy cites Wagner’s metaphysical opera. Hence, Debussy—like Nietzsche—counters the lofty world of Wagnerian metaphysics with the primitive energies of exotic dance.

### ***Contextualizing Golliwogg: The Genre of the Wagnerian Spoof***

Debussy was not the first French composer to caricature Wagner in a dance piece. *Souvenirs de Munich* (1885-6), by Chabrier, and *Souvenirs de Bayreuth* (1888), by Fauré and Messager, are suites of ballroom dances on comically distorted Wagnerian melodies. But, as I have pointed out, Debussy’s spoof, unlike those of his predecessors, engages with racial otherness as a means of grappling with the Wagner problem. This engagement brings *Golliwogg* into dialogue with

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<sup>362</sup> Charles Harrison, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 6.

Nietzsche's strategy of resistance against Wagner, and enmeshes *Children's Corner* in a challenging network of cultural and philosophical meanings.

Thus, *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*, for all its apparent frivolity, presents a philosophical critique of Wagnerian metaphysics. Debussy's critique of Wagner, as we have seen, sprang from a complex set of motivations, including his nationalistic hatred of German music and his aesthetic distaste for what he called "Wagner's bombastic metaphysics." As I hope to have demonstrated, the nuances and complexity of Debussy's reaction against Wagner are wittily—but meaningfully—encapsulated in *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*.

### ***De-Wagnerizing Wagner: Debussy's Sarabande***

Debussy's *Sarabande* (1900) enacts another direct confrontation with Wagner, but in a very different way from *Golliwogg*. The *Sarabande* opens with a chord that looks and sounds identical to the famous *Tristan* chord—but, as Gregory J. Marion observes, it "refuses to function as a Tristan chord would."<sup>363</sup> Instead of generating unresolved tension, Debussy's "Tristan" chord is treated as a stable, indeed even a restful, sonority. Taruskin argues that "From the point of view of Wagner exorcism, the first measure of Debussy's *Sarabande* would be hard to beat. Its very first chord, a half-diminished seventh, is aurally tantamount to a *Tristan*-chord; but its dissonances are not treated as something to be resolved."<sup>364</sup> Whereas Wagner's *Tristan* chord leads to a dominant-seventh harmony, creating unresolved

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<sup>363</sup> Gregory J. Marion, "Debussy and Recollection: *trois aperçu*," *Music Theory Online* 13:1 (March 2007), Accessed @ <http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.07.13.1/mto.07.13.1.marion.html>

<sup>364</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music*, 71.

tension, Debussy's "Tristan-style" chord glides in dreamy parallel motion to a minor-seventh chord (ex. 54, mm. 1-12).

The remainder of the first phrase reinforces the initial impression made by the first two chords: this is a work in which each sonority is meant to be enjoyed for its

**Sarabande**  
à Madame E. Rouart (née Y. Lerolle)

Avec une élégance grave et lente

Example 54. Claude Debussy, *Sarabande* (1901), mm. 1-12

own sake, rather than a goal-oriented progression toward resolution. The harmonies are tonally unfocused; in m. 2, Debussy makes a fleeting gesture toward establishing E as tonic, but the E Major triad soon loses focus and melts into a G# minor chord. Similarly, the B Major chord in m. 8 hints at a possible cadence on

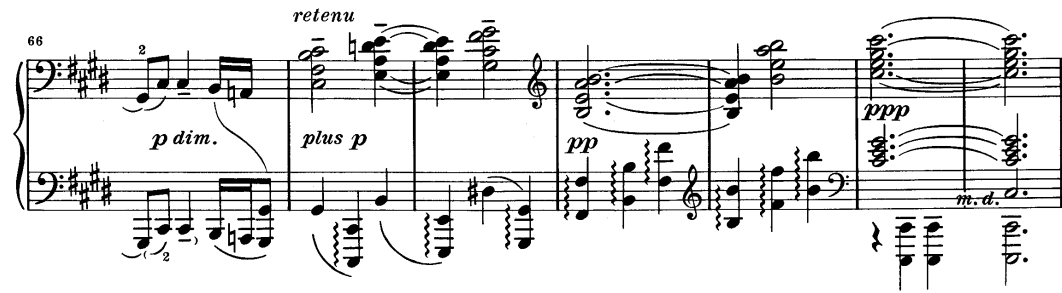
E, if the listening experience is informed by a knowledge of the four-sharp key signature indicated in the score. But the B Major triad is followed not by E, but by A Major, creating a non-functional progression. This progression is, however, more stable than the seventh chords with which the piece begins, because the notes A-F#-D# are now harmonized with consonant triads rather than dissonant seventh chords. This increase in stability strengthens the cadence somewhat. And yet the cadence does not function as a standard half-cadential gesture. Adele Katz points out that the B Major chord is retroactively presented as a mere passing chord, not as a dominant; she persuasively observes that Debussy chose to accentuate a passing chord in order to downplay functional tonality.<sup>365</sup>

But I would point to a further reason for Debussy's emphasis on B major: this chord is built on the lowered seventh scale degree, the anti-leading-tone, so to speak. Recall that Wagner's music bristles with leading tones, lending his harmonic progressions a powerful sense of forward motion. But Debussy's *Sarabande*, in (deliberate?) contrast to Wagner, is nearly devoid of leading tones. Indeed, it contains not one single instance of B# acting as a leading tone to the tonic, C#. To foreground the absence of the leading tone B#, the lowered seventh degree, B, is repeatedly emphasized instead, especially at cadential moments. This emphasis imparts a quaint, pseudo-antique modal flavor to the piece. But it also lends the work a distinctly *non-Wagnerian* sound. Let us have a look at the final cadence, a striking example of Debussy's pointed avoidance of the leading tone (ex. 55, mm.

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<sup>365</sup> Adele Katz, *Challenge to Musical Tradition: A New Concept of Tonality* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 276.

66-72). Here, the melodic line, the bass, and several inner voices, move from B to C#, substituting the modal subtonic in place of the leading tone. By quadrupling the note B in the penultimate measure, Debussy flaunts the absence of a leading tone, replacing the goal-oriented motion #7-i with the modal-sounding b7-i.



Example 55. Claude Debussy, *Sarabande* (1901), mm. 66-72

Interestingly, the title of the work—*Sarabande*—leads *back* to the bygone era of the Baroque period. As discussed above, neo-Baroque works were, in turn-of-the-century France, motivated by French nationalist sentiments—and hence by anti-Wagnerism. Thus, the genre of this work leads away from the contemporary cultural moment—a moment fraught with anxiety about Wagner—toward an idealized musical past.

But Debussy's *Sarabande* looks forward as well as backward; its non-goal-oriented harmonies are strikingly forward-looking, anticipating the dissolution of functional tonality. In this sense, Debussy's harmonies are even more radical than Wagner's—another important difference between the two composers. Along these lines, André Boucourechliev points out that “Wagner pousse l’harmonie fonctionnelle, celle qui relève du système tonal (tonique, dominante, et compagnie)

jusque dans ses derniers retranchements...Jamais pourtant Wagner ne perd l'attache avec ce système."<sup>366</sup> Debussy, on the other hand, *did* succeed in breaking free of the goal-oriented syntax of tonality: "Quant à Debussy...il dépasse l'harmonie fonctionnelle...Debussy est l'inventeur du bloc harmonique, de l'accord, proche ou éloigné de l'accord tonal, considéré en premier lieu comme *spectre sonore*."<sup>367</sup> In other words, Debussy often used chords in a coloristic manner, as masses of sound, as non-goal-oriented sonorities meant to be enjoyed for their own sake. Thus, Debussy's harmonies are more innovative than Wagner's, less bound to the system of functional tonality: "Il faut dire que Wagner n'a jamais fait ce que Debussy fait avec ses blocs."<sup>368</sup>

***Mediterranean Music:  
Debussy's Indirect Responses to Wagner***

If *Sarabande* and *Golliwogg* grapple with Wagnerian themes, responding directly to Wagner, many of Debussy's other works enact a less direct (but no less forceful) response to Wagner. This response often takes the form of exotic Spanish dance, which Debussy (following Nietzsche) uses as an antidote to Wagnerian metaphysics. Debussy loved Spain—or at least his idealized notion of Spain. He wrote numerous Spanish-flavored works; many of which are heavily based on dance rhythms, especially those of the Habanera. Bizet was one of the first French

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<sup>366</sup> "Wagner pushed functional harmony, that which constitutes the tonal system (tonic, dominant, and so forth) to the limit...But Wagner never lost his attachment to this system." Andre Boucourechliev, *Debussy: La révolution subtile* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 21. (Translation my own.)

<sup>367</sup> "As for Debussy...he superceded functional harmony...Debussy is the inventor of the harmonic block, of the chord—sometimes closely resembling tonal chords, sometimes differing markedly from them—considered primarily as a sonorous specter." Boucourechliev, *Debussy* 22. (Translation my own.)

<sup>368</sup> "It is necessary to say that Wagner never did what Debussy did with his masses of sound." Boucourechliev, *Debussy* 22. (Translation my own.)

composers to write a habanera; several other French composers followed suit, including Saint-Saëns and Chabrier.<sup>369</sup>

But, as I will demonstrate, Debussy's interest in the habanera far surpassed that of his colleagues. Whereas composers such as Saint-Saëns, Chabrier, and Bizet composed only one or two habaneras, Debussy immersed himself in the genre with an almost obsessive fervor.<sup>370</sup> Why? I contend that Debussy, like Nietzsche, counters Wagnerian metaphysics with exotic dance. Following Nietzsche's advice to reject Wagner and "mediterraneanize" music—advice that, as we have seen, was extremely famous and influential in fin-de-siècle France—Debussy wrote at least five pieces in the habanera style, along with other Mediterranean-themed works. Indeed, Debussy's contemporaries perceived his music as having a distinctly Mediterranean sound, which reinforces the link between Debussy's musical style and Nietzsche's dictum to "mediterraneanize" music. In his study of Debussy's music, written in 1913 while the composer was still alive, Daniel Chennevière asserts:

*Ibéria* marque l'apogée du naturisme chez Debussy, et de toute sa musique orchestrale....S'inspirant du prodigieux génie mauresque qui tisse sous la civilisation espagnole son fond merveilleux de poésie, il a su exprimer, condenser dans trois tableaux prestigieux, toute une race, tout un passé, toute une nature. Il a donné l'expression la plus parfaite de la civilisation méditerranéenne, de l'air, de la joie du midi, du midi le plus passionné, le plus oriental: l'Espagne.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, "Habanera," 2001.

<sup>371</sup> Daniel Chennevière, *Claude Debussy et son oeuvre* (Paris: Durand, 1913), 37-38. "Iberia marks the apogee of naturalism in Debussy, and in all his orchestral music....Inspired by the prodigious Moorish spirit which weaves its marvelous poetry into Spanish civilization, he [Debussy] was able to express, condensed in three prestigious tableaux, a race, a past, a nature. He gave the most perfect expression to the Mediterranean civilization, to the air, to the joy of the south, the most passionate and most oriental south: Spain." (Translation my own.)

Although Chennevière does not explicitly mention Nietzsche, he describes Debussy's music as Mediterranean.

Debussy's first foray into the "Mediterranean" genre of the habanera was in 1901, with *Lindaraja*, a work that seems to pay homage to *Carmen* (perhaps it is even an homage to Nietzsche's discussion of *Carmen*). *Lindaraja* is in the same key (D minor) as Bizet's famous Habanera. Like Bizet's work, *Lindaraja* sports the typical Habanera rhythm; it is in duple meter, featuring a rhythmic figure that alternates between duplets and triplets. This work makes a liberal use of exotic musical markers: it is heavily static, with a recurring ostinato figure (ex. 56, mm. 1-18). Here, Debussy paints an exotic picture of Spain that resembles Bizet's drone-laden Habanera. Even the title *Lindaraja* has a distinctly exotic connotation.

Parikalas points out that "the name Lindaraja belonged to a beautiful Moorish maiden who lived in the Alhambra."<sup>372</sup> It is interesting that Debussy chose to focus on a *Moorish* theme in this piece. Perhaps his Moorish portrayal of Spain was influenced by Nietzsche's reference to the "soothing Moorish dance" in *Carmen*.

Barely a year later, Debussy returned to the habanera genre in *La Soirée Dans Grenade* (1903), subtitled "mouvement de habanera". We have already surveyed this work in the introduction. It is even more frankly exotic than *Lindaraja*, making heavy use of drones and augmented seconds to paint an orientalized portrait of Spain. Matthew Brown points out that, rhythmically speaking, it resembles *Lindaraja*: "Debussy was well aware of the rhythmic structure of the Habanera: *Lindaraja* and *La Soirée dans Grenade* are both written in slow duple metre with

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<sup>372</sup> Parakilas, "How Spain Got a Soul," 174.



# Lindaraja

**Modéré (mais sans lenteur et dans un rythme très souple)**

PIANO I

*f* *dim.*

**Modéré (mais sans lenteur et dans un rythme très souple)**

PIANO II

*f* *dim.*

7

*pp* *p expressif, un peu en dehors*

*p* *più p* *ppp*

13

*pp* *ppp*

Example 56. Claude Debussy, *Lindaraja* (1901), mm. 1-18

the second beat subdivided into equal values.”<sup>373</sup> The first and second beats are subdivided differently, with triplets on one beat and duplets on the other. This alternation between duple and triple subdivisions is a defining rhythmic feature of the habanera.

*La Soirée Dans Grenade* is particularly interesting from the standpoint of Debussy’s anti-Wagnerism, for it is based on a characteristically Spanish type of tonality, which undercuts traditional harmonic functions—and hence undercuts Wagnerian goal orientation.<sup>374</sup> As we have seen in *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner exploits the tension of the dominant chord, and withholds tonic resolution. Thus, Wagner’s harmonic language is predicated upon dominant-tonic polarity, in which the dominant generates tension and the tonic brings repose. But Debussy dissolves this dichotomy between tonic and dominant, treating both as equally stable tonal centers in *La Soirée*, as we saw in the Introduction.

### ***Iberia: Real or Fake Spanish Style?***

Debussy’s large-scale orchestral evocation of Spain, *Iberia* (1909), offers further evidence of his interest in Spanish music. In *Iberia*, Spanish rhythms, harmonies and modes create a heady evocation of perfumed exoticism. George Liebert notes that *Iberia* exemplifies the type of music that Nietzsche, had he lived long enough, would have delighted in hearing: “*Iberia*, along with *La Mer*, would

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<sup>373</sup> Brown, *Iberia*, 51.

<sup>374</sup> James Parakilas (op. cit.) discusses this work, but from a very different standpoint. He does not address its tonal/harmonic innovations.

have filled the need for light and rhythm that Nietzsche felt.”<sup>375</sup> Moreover, as Liebert points out, Nietzsche’s longing for “Mediterranean” music appears in retrospect almost prophetic, since Nietzsche’s formula “exactly describes the brilliant renaissance that French music of the day underwent: from *Carmen* (1875) to Chabrier’s *España* (1883) to Debussy’s *Iberia* (1910), it resisted the pressure of Wagnerianism by turning joyfully toward Spain.”<sup>376</sup> Liebert implies that the resonances between Nietzsche’s *Case of Wagner* and Debussy’s *Iberia* are merely coincidental. But, in my view, Debussy deliberately tailored his music to Nietzsche’s Mediterranean formula.

According to Matthew Brown, *Iberia* combines authentic Spanish features with generic Orientalist features.<sup>377</sup> In so doing, I contend that Debussy is drawing upon Bizet’s strategy in *Carmen*, for Bizet made use of some genuine Spanish elements as well as the Orientalist toolkit. This link between Debussy and Bizet ties *Iberia* to *Carmen* and therefore to *The Case of Wagner*. The interaction between genuine and stereotypical features in *Iberia*, and its relationship to *Carmen*, is the main theme of this section.

The first movement, “Par les rues et par les chemins,” locates itself firmly in the French tradition of exoticism through its use of the standard Orientalist markers, particularly modality and pedal points. The former is established as salient from the outset of the first movement, for the bass-line motive used in the first seven measures, G-F-A ( $\wedge^1$ - $\wedge^b7$ - $\wedge^2$ ), imparts a distinctly Mixolydian flavor to the music.

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<sup>375</sup> Liebert, *Nietzsche on Music*, 197.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Matthew Brown, *Iberia*, 51-64.

Although the main melody, when it enters in m. 8, is in a tonal G Major (ex. 57, *Iberia*, Par les rues et par les chemins, mm. 1-9), it takes on a modal character upon its reprise in m. 30, where it is restated in C Phrygian (ex. 58, *Iberia*, Par les rues et par les chemins, mm. 28-33). The Phrygian mode also plays an important cadential role throughout the first movement. For instance, a Phrygian cadence occurs near the end of the movement (mm. 304-7), featuring a  $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{b}3-\hat{b}2-1$  descent in the bass, outlining a Phrygian pentachord (ex. 59, *Iberia*, Par les rues et par les chemins, mm. 304-314). These, and other, modal passages in “Par les Rues” are tied to the French exotic tradition, for modality (as we have seen) is a salient characteristic of French exotic music, from Félicien David through Saint-Saëns.

## IBERIA

Transcription pour Piano à 2 mains  
par LUCIEN GARBAN

Claude DEBUSSY

### I. Par les rues et par les chemins

**Assez animé** (dans un rythme alerte, mais précis) (♩=176)

**PIANO**

Example 57. Claude Debussy, *Iberia*, Par les rues et par les chemins (1909) mm. 1-9



Example 58. Claude Debussy, *Iberia*, Par les rues et par les chemins (1909), mm.  
28-33

Example 59. Claude Debussy, *Iberia*, Par les rues et par les chemins (1909) mm.  
304-314

The Frenchness of “Par les Rues” is further enhanced through Debussy’s prominent use of long-held pedal tones, another trait associated with the French exotic vocabulary. The opening melody is underpinned by a drone fifth, a feature common to many French exotic works (we encountered it in, for example, David’s “Danse des Almées” from *Le Désert* and Bizet’s similarly-titled “L’almée” from *Djamileh*). Much later in the movement, the main melody is restated (with modal alterations) over an extended pedal on E, lasting from mm. 122-169. Following almost immediately on the heels of the E pedal, a G pedal is initiated in m. 186 and lasts through m. 201. The heavy use of stasis marks this movement as a descendent of works such as Massenet’s *Hérodiade* and Saint-Saëns’ *Princesse Jaune*, both of which (as we saw in Chapter 1) make a similar use of pedal points and ostinatos.

Although “Par les Rues” makes liberal use of generic exotic markers such as pedal points and modal inflections, it also contains a number of Spanish features, grounding its otherwise diffuse exoticism in a specifically Spanish context. Its rhythmic profile, in particular, is strongly evocative of Spanish dance. As Matthew Brown observes, the first theme is based on the rhythms of the *Sevillana*, a type of Spanish dance.<sup>378</sup> Interplay between duple and triple meter, occurring throughout the movement, further enriches the Spanish flavor of the music.<sup>379</sup>

Spanish dance rhythms play an even more salient role in the second movement, “Les Parfums de la Nuit,” a habanera in all but name. As Parakilas notes, in this movement “fragments of habanera rhythms are heard in a hundred

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 53.

guises—four measures of the dotted rhythm from the tambourine here, a melody with the habanera triplet (but slowed to half the normal speed) from the French horn there...A whole-tone habanera melody, marked ‘expressive, a bit drawn out.’”<sup>380</sup> Thus, “Les Parfums” is replete with habanera-like rhythmic gestures, distributed across the fabric of the orchestra in colorful ways.

In addition to his use of exotic rhythms and harmonies, Debussy also makes use of exotic orchestral effects in *Iberia*; for instance, “Par les Rues” uses tambourines and castanets to create timbral exoticism. These instruments, characteristic of Spanish musical culture, may seem to suggest authentic Spanish color, but they are equally characteristic of the French exotic tradition. Much French exotic music, such as Bizet’s *Carmen*, calls for unusual instruments such as tambourines and castanets. Indeed, these instruments became, in the hands of French composers, generic signifiers of exoticism, often dissociated from a specifically Spanish context. For instance, as we saw in Chapter 1, Berlioz uses tambourines in the “Danse des Esclaves” from *Les Troyens*. In fact, a few years after Debussy’s *Iberia*, Ravel used castanets to suggest ancient Greece in *Daphnis et Chloe*. Kramer observes that Ravel “does not hesitate to enliven ancient Greece with castanets and Basque drums.”<sup>381</sup> This suggests that, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ‘Spanish’ instruments, such as castanets and tambourines, had been thoroughly absorbed into a generalized Orientalist language. Thus, Debussy’s use of these instruments is not necessarily based on genuine Spanish music; rather, it suggests

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<sup>380</sup> Parakilas, “How Spain Got a Soul,” 180.

<sup>381</sup> Lawrence Kramer, “Consuming the Exotic” *Classical music and postmodern knowledge*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 223.

that Debussy employs the same battery of exotic instruments as his French predecessors, participating in the French exotic tradition.

The faux-Spanishness of Debussy's orchestral effects is particularly evident in the final movement of *Iberia*, in which Debussy "instructs the violin and viola players to hold their instruments under the arm, 'Quasi Guitara.'"<sup>382</sup> Instead of using actual guitars to create an authentic Spanish timbre, Debussy *imitates* the sound of guitars, opting for fakery and illusion rather than verisimilitude. The word "quasi" ("like") reveals an important aspect of Debussy's musical exoticism: its imaginative dimension. Musical exoticism aims not at faithful recreation of foreign musical styles; rather, it aims to be *like* (a Western composer's impression of) exotic music.

In fact, the music critic Louis Laloy frankly admitted that *Iberia* aims at fanciful evocation rather than ethnomusicological verisimilitude: "Why *Iberia*? Simply because one day the composer felt nostalgia for the Spain he had dreamed of. His composition is not a document; it is an 'image,' shaped first of all in his mind."<sup>383</sup> To this I would add that *Iberia* was shaped also by the French tradition of exotic music, for the Spain of Debussy's dreams was heavily mediated by a century-long tradition of Spanish exoticism in French music.

### ***La Sérénade Interrompue***

Shortly after finishing *Iberia*, Debussy composed *La Sérénade Interrompue*

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<sup>382</sup> Brown, *Iberia* 14.

<sup>383</sup> Laloy, *Louis Laloy on Debussy, Ravel, and Stravinsky* 216.



(1910), another Spanish-flavored work. Replete with strummed chords and staccato notes, this work imitates the sound of Spanish guitars. Modal inflections add to the Spanish character of this piece. Although in B-flat minor, the piece contains many C-flats, which create a Phrygian inflection. The Phrygian mode is characteristic of much Spanish flamenco music, and it underscores the Spanish coloring of this prelude (ex. 60, mm. 1-19). As Matthew Brown points out, this work belongs to a long list of Spanish pieces by Debussy: “After 1900, Debussy wrote several piano works with strong Hispanic allusions—*Lindaraja* for piano duet (1901), *La Soirée dans Grenade*, *Masques*, ‘*La Sérénade Interrompue*,’ and ‘*La Puerta del Vino*.’”<sup>384</sup>

IX...

The musical score for Example 60 is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-6) is marked 'Modérément animé' and 'quasi guitarra'. It begins with a piano (pp) dynamic and includes the instruction 'comme en préludant'. The second system (measures 7-13) continues the piece with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and includes a piano (pp) dynamic. The third system (measures 14-19) includes a ritardando (rit.) and a return to 'a tempo'. The piece concludes with a piano (pp) dynamic and a final chord.

Example

60. Claude Debussy, Preludes, Book 1, No. 9, *La Sérénade Interrompue* (1910), mm. 1-19

<sup>384</sup> Brown, *Iberia* 38.

### **Puerta Del Vino: Exotic Ostinatos**

Another prelude from this list of Spanish-themed pieces is *La Puerta del Vino* (1912, from *Preludes*, Book 2). In my analysis, I seek to show that this piece uses ostinatos in structurally significant ways. I am the first scholar to examine the layers of exotic meaning created by the ostinatos in *Puerta*. Revuluri explores the use of exotic features in *Puerta* from a different perspective, highlighting the similarities between *Puerta* and some French transcriptions of non-Western music. She points out that *Puerta* contains exotic rhythmic patterns, such as sextuplet figures.<sup>385</sup> As she demonstrates, these patterns are also found in many French transcriptions of music heard at the 1889 World's Fair. The similar rhythmic profile, she suggests, helps to show that the transcriptions borrowed exotic markers from French art music.

My aim is different. In *Puerta*, I would like to show that Debussy borrows exotic markers from his own French predecessors. Chief among these is the ostinato. Two drone-like ostinatos anchor *Puerta*—the first one, a two-note drone, is almost continually present throughout the first 41 measures. The second drone, also a two-note figure, lasts from mm. 45-65. At measure 66, the initial drone reappears, and continues throughout the remainder of the piece. These drones are performing significant musical work, articulating the structure of the piece. But I believe that the drone figure also serves to frame and contain the rambling, digressive melodies that proliferate throughout the piece.

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<sup>385</sup> Revuluri, 113.

The melody from mm. 5-16 is tonally dissociated from the drone-like ostinato, which remains rooted to the tonic triad, even as the melody traverses the distant realm of E Phrygian (ex. 61, mm. 1-24). ). Boyd Pomeroy hears the melody and ostinato as belonging to the same key. He writes that the chromatic melody “initially produces the effect of scale degrees b7-7.”<sup>386</sup> Here, he interprets the melody as belonging to the key of the ostinato, D-flat major. But I interpret the tonal structure differently. The piece strikes me as bitonal, at least from mm. 5-16, where the ostinato suggests the key of D-flat, but the melody suggests an E-centered mode.

Specifically, the melody emphasizes the notes E and B, suggesting an E Phrygian orientation. Pomeroy senses that *Puerta* is comprised of stratified layers: “Each collectional stage of the arabesque (octatonic-hexatonic-chromatic) is restricted to its own fixed registral space, producing a remarkable effect of collectionally stratified polyphony.”<sup>387</sup> But the stratification that Pomeroy hears is not due solely to the use of different collections and registers. Adding to his insightful analysis, I assert that this stratification also stems from bitonality.

The tonal discrepancy between the melody and the ostinato accompaniment underscores the conflict between these two elements of the music. The ostinato is the voice of predictability and reason. Ticking like clockwork throughout the piece, it seems to counterbalance the florid excess—and the tonal digressions--of the melody. In other words, the ostinato places the flamboyant melody within a

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<sup>386</sup> Boyd Pomeroy, "Toward A New Tonal Practice: Chromaticism and Form in Debussy's Orchestral Music," (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2000), p. 58.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 60.

Mouvt de Habanera  
avec de brusques oppositions d'extrême  
violence et de passionnée douceur

The musical score is written for piano in 2/4 time, featuring a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The piece is characterized by its complex, layered textures and frequent changes in dynamics and articulation.

**Measures 1-5:** The piece begins with a dynamic of *f* (forte). The right hand features a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include *f*, *p* (piano), and *f*. The tempo/mood is marked *p très expressif*.

**Measures 6-11:** The texture continues with a dynamic of *sim.* (sostenuto). The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and a triplet in measure 10. The left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

**Measures 12-14:** The right hand features a complex, rapid melodic passage with slurs and a triplet. The left hand continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics include *p* and *pp* (pianissimo).

**Measures 15-19:** The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and a triplet. The left hand continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics include *p molto dim.* (piano molto diminuendo) and *pp*.

**Measures 20-24:** The piece concludes with a dynamic of *pp*. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and a triplet. The left hand continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

Example 61. Claude Debussy, Preludes II, *La Puerta del Vino* (1912), mm. 1-24

harmonically and rhythmically static framework. For example, mm. 11-17 feature a highly ornamented, rhapsodic melody, unfolding in improvisatory fashion over a static underpinning.

At m. 21, the ostinato temporarily ceases, replaced by a rapidly arpeggiated chord, marked *sf*. The sudden dynamic shift, and the cessation of the ostinato, suggests an abrupt, unrestrained outburst of passion. But the ostinato returns in the second half of m. 21, tempering the sudden outburst of rapid, loud notes. In fact, in m. 22, the ostinato is heard alone, almost as if it has succeeded in muzzling the passion of the previous measure.

Thus, the ostinato is a salient feature of *Puerta*, containing and framing the exotic melody. But even this framing device is associated with exoticism, for the ostinato is itself an exotic marker.

***Southern Comfort:  
Debussy's Les Collines d'Anacapri***

Debussy's interest in Mediterranean locales was by no means limited to Spain. In addition to his body of Spanish-themed pieces, he evokes the sunny exoticism of Italy in his piano prelude *Les Collines d'Anacapri* (1910). Anacapri is a small town on the Italian island of Capri; owing to its isolation from mainland Italy, it is an idyllic, bucolic place, exotic by virtue of its pastoral remoteness from modern life. Debussy spent several blissful summers in Anacapri; his sunny, exuberant prelude *Les Collines d'Anacapri* is a tribute to the idyllic hours that he spent on the small Italian island. In what follows, I hope to show that *Les Collines d'Anacapri* is also, in significant ways, a tribute to Nietzsche's love of Southern Mediterranean

cultures.

Before examining the Nietzschean elements of Debussy's *Anacapri*, it is necessary to examine Nietzsche's view of Italy. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche praises Italian (and Spanish) art for its Southern sensuality:

The vulgar element in everything that gives pleasure in Southern Europe—whether it be Italian opera (for example, Rossini and Bellini) or the Spanish novel of adventure (most readily accessible for us in the French disguise of Gil Blas) does not escape me, but it does not offend me anymore than does the vulgarity that one encounters as one walks through Pompeii.<sup>388</sup>

Here, Nietzsche asserts that he finds Southern vulgarity to be inoffensive; he even implies that it is appealing and enticing, rather than repellent. Why is Italian and Spanish vulgarity so attractive to him? Musing upon this question, Nietzsche implies that the *shamelessness* of Southern vulgarity appeals to him:

Is it because there is no sense of shame and everything vulgar appears as poised and self-assured as anything noble, lovely, and passionate in the same sort of music or novel: 'The animal has as much right as any human being; let it run about freely. And you, my dear fellow man, are also still an animal in spite of everything!' That seems to me to be the moral of this story and the peculiarity of Southern humanity.<sup>389</sup>

In this passage, Nietzsche is arguing that Southerners are free of the morbid German preoccupation with metaphysics; they accept their physicality without shame or squeamishness. Thus, Italians and Spaniards are, for Nietzsche, non-Wagnerian in their joyous embrace of the flesh. Nietzsche explicitly contrasts Southern sensuality with German metaphysics in the following paragraph, where he

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<sup>388</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 131-132. As Forth points out, this work was translated into French in 1901 by Henri Albert (Christopher Forth, *Zarathustra in Paris*, 186).

<sup>389</sup> Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 134.

writes: “A vulgar turn in Northern works, on the other hand, in German music, for example, offends me unspeakably. Here there is a sense of shame; the artist has lowered himself in his own eyes and could not even help blushing.”<sup>390</sup> When Nietzsche refers to “German music,” the implication is clear: he is referring to Wagner. Nietzsche suggests that Wagner’s desire for transcendence is motivated by shame. Wagner seeks to transcend the physical world because he is ashamed of corporeal desire. But Spanish and Italian composers, on the other hand, are free of shame and hence they do not seek to transcend the physical world.

Debussy’s *Les Collines D’Anacapri*, a festive piece that bubbles over with unabashed passion, resonates with Nietzsche’s description of Italy as a land of unfettered sensuality. Much of *Anacapri* is based on dance rhythms, rooting the work in the physical world of bodily movement, rather than the metaphysical world of transcendence. The dance rhythms that run through this work evoke the tarantella, a spirited Italian folk dance in compound duple meter. Already in mm. 3-4, before the main melody of the piece has begun, the tarantella rhythm asserts itself.

Thus, the first section of *Anacapri* sparkles with the infectious rhythms of the tarantella. To underscore the cheerful character of the tarantella tune, Debussy marks this melody “joyeux et léger” (joyous and light) in m. 14. Nietzsche, who celebrated the light-heartedness and vitality of Bizet’s exotic dances, would no doubt have approved of Debussy’s liberal use of tarantella rhythms in *Anacapri*. Moreover, Nietzsche would have viewed Debussy’s use of tarantella rhythms as an

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 132.

anti-Wagnerian move, an exorcism of Wagnerian metaphysics in favor of “Southern” physicality. Thus, both Nietzsche and Debussy counter the lofty world of Wagnerian metaphysics with the physical energies of Southern dance.

### *Exoticism in Les Collines d’Anacapri*

As we have seen, *Anacapri* is Nietzschean in its expression of Southern sensuality, drawing upon dance rhythms to evoke the body in motion. But *Anacapri* is also Nietzschean in another significant way: as I shall demonstrate, it is replete with exotic markers, lending the piece an exotic air that would have struck Nietzsche as decidedly un-Wagnerian. As we have seen, Nietzsche prescribes Mediterranean exoticism as an antidote to Wagnerian metaphysics: as a

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Example 62. Claude Debussy, Preludes, Book 1, No. 5, *Les Collines d'Anacapri* (1910), mm. 1-11

Mediterranean-themed piece that makes use of exotic markers, *Anacapri* follows this prescription of Nietzsche's.

*Anacapri* makes use of a specific type of exoticism, a type that Jeremy Day-O'Connell calls the "pastoral-exotic." Day-O'Connell does not provide an explicit definition of this term, but we might define it as a pastoral work that paints an exoticized portrait of rural life. Why might the pastoral and the exotic go hand-in-hand? The answer lies in the fact that bucolic locales—such as Anacapri—seem exotic to most city-dwellers; they appear far-off, remote, and culturally "other." Along these lines, Ralph Locke calls our attention to "the traditional linking of the exotic and the natural world."<sup>391</sup>

With respect to the musical signifiers of the pastoral-exotic, pentatonicism is a defining characteristic of pastoral exoticism: "Pastoral pentatonicism's domestic origins should not obscure the fact of its own potential exoticism, which is to say, its opposition to the mundane realities of urban European life."<sup>392</sup> Day-O'Connell does not cite *Anacapri* as an example of the pastoral-exotic pentatonic, but it offers an excellent example of the way in which these three strands—the pastoral, the exotic, and the pentatonic—interact with each other in meaningful ways.

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<sup>391</sup> Ralph Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers," 125.

<sup>392</sup> Day-O'Connell, *Pentatonicism*, 98.

*Pentatonicism, Stasis and the Pastoral-Exotic  
In Les Collines d'Anacapri*

*Les Collines d'Anacapri* is thoroughly exotic, making a liberal use of two exotic markers: pentatonicism and stasis. Although scholars often remark in passing that *Anacapri* has an exotic flavor, its exotic features have not received sustained scholarly attention. David Code, for instance, briefly notes an affinity between *Anacapri* and Debussy's more overtly Oriental/exotic works such as *Pagodes*: "*Les collines d'Anacapri*...revisits both the g#minor/B major ambivalence of *Pagodes* and its general exoticist—in this case sunny and Neapolitan—idealism."<sup>393</sup> Paul Roberts is even briefer in his remarks on *Anacapri*'s exoticism: "This [*Anacapri*] is a wonderful prelude, vibrant, exotic, with the panache of popular music."<sup>394</sup> In what follows, I will seek to demonstrate that exoticism is a pervasive and salient element of *Anacapri*. This supports my overall thesis regarding Debussy's profound engagement with exotic features.

In David Kopp's rich study of pentatonicism in *Anacapri*, he observes that "pentatonic organization pervades nearly every note of the first and third sections, and forms an important secondary element in the middle section."<sup>395</sup> Pentatonicism asserts itself from the very first measure of *Anacapri*; the first measure unfolds a pentatonic collection, perhaps evoking "pentatonically tuned bells," as Bruhn suggests.<sup>396</sup> This collection is tonally ambiguous. Debussy often draws on

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<sup>393</sup> David Code, "Parting the Veils of Debussy's *Voiles*," *Scottish Music Review* 1:1 (2007): 53.

<sup>394</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1996), 250.

<sup>395</sup> David Kopp, "Pentatonic Organization in Two Piano Pieces of Debussy," *Journal of Music Theory* 41:2 (Autumn 1997): 266.

<sup>396</sup> Bruhn, *Images and Ideas*, 58.

pentatonic collections to create tonal ambiguity, as Boyd Pomeroy points out: “In Debussy’s diatonic writing the quality of harmonic goal-directedness, so crucially defining for earlier tonal styles, is often undermined through the characteristic presence of a (strictly non-functional) pentatonic patina.”<sup>397</sup> The first measure of *Anacapri* exemplifies Debussy’s tendency to undermine tonal direction through pentatonic coloration.

But the first measure is not *entirely* directionless; subtly, almost imperceptibly, the key of B major begins to take shape toward the end of m. 1 (refer back to ex. 62). Day-O’Connell calls our attention to the “key-defining nature of the unaccompanied pentatonic theme of Debussy’s *Les collines d’Anacapri*,” pointing out that this theme ends with a motion from the sixth scale degree to the tonic.<sup>398</sup> Day-O’Connell refers to this motion as a “plagal leading tone,” arguing that this type of motion frequently occurs in pentatonic music, and acts as a substitute of sorts for the more familiar motion from the seventh scale degree to the tonic.

In m. 3 of *Anacapri*, a snatch of a tarantella tune is heard; this fragmentary motive is largely pentatonic (refer back to ex. 62). As Kopp points out, the D# acts as a rhythmically weak non-harmonic tone that colors the underlying pentatonic basis of the motive.<sup>399</sup>

Let us turn now to m. 14, in which the main melody of the piece is introduced (ex. 63, mm. 14-20). This melody is largely pentatonic. Its only non-pentatonic note, B, is treated as a nonharmonic passing tone. It is significant to note that

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<sup>397</sup> Pomeroy, “Debussy’s Tonality,” 157.

<sup>398</sup> Jeremy Day-O’Connell, “Debussy, Pentatonicism, and the Tonal Tradition,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 31 (2009): 236.

<sup>399</sup> Kopp, “Pentatonic Organization,” 267.

Debussy treats the tonic, B, as a mere passing tone; in doing so, he undermines functional tonality, thus creating a directionless, non-Wagnerian soundscape. Contributing to the goalless, static quality of the music is the left-hand ostinato, in



Example 63. Claude Debussy, *Les Collines d'Anacapri* (1910), mm. 14-20

essentially a tremolo that persists until m. 21. This ostinato, itself largely pentatonic, reinforces the exotic, pastoral tone of the passage, for ostinatos connote both the exotic and the pastoral.<sup>400</sup> The tarantella rhythms of the melody (discussed in the previous section) further enhance the folkloric mood of this passage, for the tarantella, a folk dance, conjures up the pastoral rhythms of village life.

<sup>400</sup> Jeremy Day-O'Connell notes that ostinatos, when combined with pentatonicism, often signify a pastoral-exotic topic. See O'Connell, *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy*, 63.

In m. 21, the left hand takes up the melody while the right hand introduces a markedly static ostinato figure (ex. 64, mm. 21-29). Almost drone-like in its insistence on a single pitch, the right hand repeats F# in broken octaves from mm. 21-29. Although F# is the dominant, it does not act as a functional dominant in this passage. Instead of driving urgently toward a tonic cadence (as do Wagner's dominant pedals), it is treated as a stable pitch in no need of resolution.

The rest of the work continues in a similar vein, with pentatonic, non-directional harmonies creating a pastoral, exotic tone—and the tarantella rhythms lend a note of Mediterranean sensuality to the music.

Example 64. Claude Debussy, *Les collines d'Anacapri* (1910) mm. 21-29

### *Nietzsche and Dance*

Now that we have examined a number of dance pieces by Debussy, let's take a closer look at Nietzsche's view of dance as an antidote to Wagnerian metaphysics. His interest in dance has been largely overlooked in the literature; scholars such as Gary Tomlinson and Matthew Rampley have observed that he critiqued metaphysics, but they have not addressed the role of dance in his critique. As a firm believer in the value of the physical world, he celebrated the physicality of dance. Indeed, he figures writing as a form of dance: "For you cannot subtract every form of *dancing* from *noble education*, the ability to dance with the feet with concepts, with words; do I still need to say that you must also be able to dance with the *pen*—that you must learn to *write*?"<sup>401</sup> He even views thinking as a type of dance: "Thinking needs to be learned just as dancing needs to be learned, *as* a kind of dancing."<sup>402</sup> Here, Nietzsche seeks to break down the traditional distinction between the mind and the body. He links the mind not with disembodied thought, but with the physicality of dance. For Nietzsche, thinking is an *embodied* process, associated with the rhythms of dance.

Music, too, is for Nietzsche linked with dance. He criticizes Wagner for writing music that is devoid of dance elements: "In older music, what one had to do in the dainty, or solemn, or fiery back and forth, quicker and slower, was something quite different, namely to dance....Richard Wagner wanted a different kind of

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<sup>401</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 42, "What the Germans Lack," Sec. 7. As Christopher Forth points out, this book was translated into French in 1899 by Henri Albert (Christopher Forth, *Zarathustra in Paris* 186).

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

movement; he overthrew the physiological presupposition of previous music. Swimming, floating—no longer walking and dancing.”<sup>403</sup> For Nietzsche, good music should possess rhythmic vitality; it should make the listener want to dance. And this is one of the reasons why *Carmen* appealed to him. As Gary Tomlinson points out, the music of *Carmen* “steps boldly, marches, *dances*—no treading water here.”<sup>404</sup> And, in that sense, *Carmen* is the antithesis of Wagnerian opera, which portrays the metaphysical striving of the will rather than the physical movement of the body. As we have seen, Nietzsche is highly critical of Wagner for his attempt to transcend the body; he argues that music should be grounded in the body: “What is it that my whole body really expects of music? For there is no soul. I believe, its own *ease*, as if all animal functions should be quickened by easy, bold, exuberant, self-assured rhythms.”<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Nietzsche, “Nietzsche Contra Wagner,” Trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann. *The Portable Nietzsche*. Penguin, 1983, 666. As noted by Marc Sagnol, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* was translated into French in 1899 by Henry Albert (Marc Sagnol, “La première réception de Nietzsche en France,” 106.

<sup>404</sup> Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, 121.

<sup>405</sup> Nietzsche, “Nietzsche Contra Wagner,” 664.

## Chapter Five

### *Exoticism Absorbed*

As we have seen throughout the previous chapters, Nietzsche regarded musical exoticism as an antidote to Wagnerian metaphysics. In light of Nietzsche's enormous popularity in fin-de-siècle French culture (which, as I have shown, is amply demonstrated in the French journals of the time), I argue that Nietzsche had a profound influence on Debussy's musical style. Nietzsche advised composers to "mediterraneanize" and exoticize their music in order to overthrow Wagnerian influence. And this is exactly what Debussy did. Not only did Nietzsche inspire Debussy to write Mediterranean-style dance music (in the form of habaneras, tarantellas and so on), he also influenced Debussy's overall musical style. Many of Debussy's pieces, even pieces without exotic titles, are laden with exotic markers. In other words, Debussy absorbed exotic markers into his musical language. This, I argue, is a response to Nietzsche's dictum. Guided by this dictum, Debussy--through his absorption of exotic markers--brings together the three main strands that we have been examining: exoticism, nationalism and anti-Wagnerism.

Debussy's wide-ranging interest in exoticism mirrors the scope and breadth of Nietzsche's own interest. By no means was Nietzsche interested only in Mediterranean exoticism. Although his formula specifies the Mediterranean as his preferred exotic locale, his writings on music refer to a wide variety of exotic places. Indeed, his discussion of *Carmen* is replete with exotic imagery, not all of which is specifically Mediterranean. For instance, he writes that *Carmen* makes



him feel Indian: “Every time I heard *Carmen* I seemed to myself more of a philosopher, a better philosopher, than I generally consider myself: so patient do I become, so happy, so Indian.”<sup>406</sup> A few paragraphs later, he associates *Carmen* with Africa when he writes, “Its cheerfulness is African.”<sup>407</sup>

These passages demonstrate that he links *Carmen* not only with the Mediterranean, but also with India and Africa. Thus, the “Mediterranean” for Nietzsche is not place-specific; it functions as a metaphor of exoticism in general. In Nietzsche’s writings, the geographical location of the “Mediterranean” is fluid; he conflated many different exotic countries and features under the flexible banner of the Mediterranean. For instance, in a passage discussed earlier in this chapter, he writes that he dreams of “a supra-German music that does not fade away at the sight of a voluptuous blue sea and the brightness of the Mediterranean sky...a supra-European music that prevails even before the brown sunsets of the desert, a music whose soul is related to palm trees and feels at home and knows how to roam among great, beautiful, lonely beasts of prey.”<sup>408</sup>

This sentence ranges rapidly over a wide variety of different exotic countries. Here, Nietzsche evokes the tropics (with palm trees), the desert (with its brown sunsets) and the savannah (with the beasts of prey)—all in one sentence! Thus, Nietzsche is conflating several different exotic locales, jumbling them together under the elastic term “supra-European” music.

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<sup>406</sup> Nietzsche, “Case of Wagner,” 613.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 614.

<sup>408</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 195.

Such conflation of exotic locales was standard practice in Nietzsche's time. Most 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europeans lumped all non-Western countries together as "the Orient" or "the exotic." Susan McClary points to "the radical interchangeability of exotic types for the cultural Orientalist: Persian, Greek, Jewish, Spanish, African—all wash together in an undifferentiated realm of Otherness."<sup>409</sup> Musical evocations of exoticism reflect this perceived interchangeability; the same set of exotic markers is used for all exotic locales. As Dahlhaus argues, "Regardless of the milieu being depicted, exoticism and folklorism almost invariably make do with the same technical devices."<sup>410</sup>

*Carmen* invites the type of conflation performed by Nietzsche, for "there is a significant blurring of racial Others throughout the opera, with gypsies portrayed in part through the musical discourse of Cuba."<sup>411</sup> Thus, the European tradition of exoticism, and *Carmen* in particular, offered ample precedent for Nietzsche's own conflation of exotic locales. All of this is relevant to our study of Debussy, for I contend that Nietzsche's conflation—his "pan-exoticism", as it were—opened up a space for Debussy to make a broad, generalized use of exotic markers. Like most Western composers, Debussy uses the same exotic markers regardless of which country is being represented. For instance, he uses pedal points and augmented seconds in *La Soirée dans Grenade* (which represents Spain) and *Pour l'Égyptienne* (which represents Egypt). To be sure, certain exotic markers tend to be treated as

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<sup>409</sup> McClary, *Carmen*, 30.

<sup>410</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 306.

<sup>411</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 63-64.

place-specific, such as habanera rhythms. But most of the markers explored in this dissertation are generic symbols of exoticism.

Thus, Debussy, like his predecessors, treats exotic markers as semiotically promiscuous, capable of signifying a wide variety of different countries. But he goes even further than his predecessors in his generalized use of exotic markers. He uses exotic markers in a staggering variety of different contexts, even in pieces that have no overt connection to the exotic (such as *Des Pas sur la Neige*, *String Quartet no. 1*, and so on). That is, he absorbs exotic markers into his general musical style. This absorption is a radical, extreme form of conflation. I argue that Debussy's radical conflation of exotic locales was influenced by Nietzsche, who (as we saw above) called for a diffuse exoticism that makes no distinction between specific exotic locales. That is, Nietzsche yearned for exotic music that was not place-specific, not tied to a particular country; he urged composers to write music that evokes exoticism in general. This is the kind of music that Debussy wrote.

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that Debussy absorbed certain markers of exoticism into his general style. To this end, I will examine his use of exotic markers in several ostensibly non-exotic works—works whose titles signal no apparent connection to the exotic. Specifically, I will show that stasis and modality, two of the markers that characterize the French tradition of exoticism, play a salient role in Debussy's music, often in conjunction with other exotic markers such as pentatonicism, unusual orchestral effects, and descending chromatic lines. My ultimate goal here is to argue that, in Debussy's hands, exotic markers became markers of Frenchness, musical emblems of a national tradition. Through

saturating his music with markers of this tradition, he succeeded in countering Wagner's influence and stamping his music as French.

This chapter is in two parts. The first part examines Debussy's use of stasis in *Des Pas sur la Neige*, *La Cathédral Engloutie*, *Voiles*, and *Fêtes*. The second section focuses on modality in *Nuages*, *Hommage à Rameau*, *String Quartet no. 1*, and *L'Isle Joyeuse*.

### ***Stasis: An Exotic Marker and its Absorption***

#### *Des Pas sur la Neige*

*Des Pas sur la Neige* would seem to have no connection to the exotic—snow, after all, is not an exotic topic! But its musical language *is* drawn from the vocabulary of exoticism, showing Debussy's absorption of exotic musical features into non-exotic works. Specifically, it is replete with the same type of modality and stasis found in many French exotic works. In fact, like the example from Massenet's *Hérodiade* examined in Chapter 1, *Des Pas* traverses at times through shifting modes without modulating away from the tonic of D. It opens in D Aeolian; in m. 5 it shifts to D Dorian, changing only the mode, not the tonic. Its use of stasis also resembles Massenet's: the "D-E" ostinato figure first presented in m. 1 is heard throughout much of the piece, always repeated with the same rhythm and in the same register. In short, then, Debussy's use of stasis and shifting modality in *Des Pas Sur la Neige* derives from the exotic toolkit employed by Debussy's immediate predecessors.

Ostinato figures play an important structural role in Debussy's *Des Pas Sur la Neige*. As I hope to demonstrate, the static sound-world of this piece is drawn from the vocabulary of exotic opera; however, Debussy recontextualizes the trope of stasis, divesting it of its Oriental connotations. In this piece, ostinatos do not signify the unchanging, timeless Orient; instead, they paint a static portrait of a frozen landscape.

*Des Pas sur la Neige* opens with an unaccompanied ostinato; this figure, consisting of the notes D-E and E-F, continues throughout much of the work (ex. 65, mm. 1-23). Moreover, the ostinato serves as the basis for much motivic material. For instance, the melody, which enters over the ostinato figure in m. 2, grows out of the motivic structure of the ostinato. The ostinato spans the interval of a third, filled in by stepwise motion (D-E-E-F). Similarly, the opening melodic fragment, Bb-C-D, spans a third as well. The first phrase ends with a falling third, further reinforcing the importance of this interval.

Throughout the first phrase, the melody is in the top voice, and the ostinato is in the bottom voice, providing a static underpinning. Beginning in m. 5, however, a bass voice is added below the ostinato, thickening the texture. The addition of a moving bass line lessens the static effect of the ostinato, rendering it less prominent and less audible. Indeed, from measures 1-6, the ostinato gradually becomes less prominent. It is highly prominent in m. 1, where it is heard alone; it is slightly less prominent in mm. 2-4, because it is paired with a melody. The melody draws some of the listener's attention away from the ostinato and redirects the focus toward the melodic line. The ostinato becomes even less prominent in mm. 5-6, because the

addition of a moving bass part mitigates the static effect of the ostinato and renders it less audible. In m. 7, the ostinato disappears entirely, as if it has been so thoroughly weakened that it now disappears altogether.

Triste et lent  $\text{♩} = 44$

*pp* *p expressif et douloureux* *più pp*

Ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore d'un fond de paysage triste et glacé

*m. d.* *expressif*

*pp* *retenu*

Example 65. (mm.1-23) Debussy, Preludes I, *Des Pas Sur La Neige* (1909-1910)  
mm. 1-15 (mm. 16-23, next page)



Example 65. (mm.1-23 cont.) Debussy, Preludes I, Des Pas Sur La Neige (1909-1910) mm. 16-23

In m. 8, however, it returns with a vengeance, now located in the top voice. Until this point, the melody has been in the top voice, with the ostinato occurring below. The listener's ear has therefore been directed toward the upper line, since it has been the locus of melodic activity. In other words, the listener has been conditioned to listen more to the top than to the other voices. Now, however, the ostinato has assumed—I would even say usurped—the prominent position formerly occupied by the melody. Moreover, very little melodic material is presented in mm. 8-11, even in the lower voices; the ostinato hence dominates the musical texture.

But the ostinato temporarily ceases in mm. 12-13. When the ostinato last disappeared in m. 7, the top voice presented an unaccompanied melodic fragment. During *this* disappearance of the ostinato, however, it is the lowest voice that presents melodic material, not the highest. It seems that the top voice has been rendered temporarily incapable of carrying the melody; for the last four measures

(mm. 8-11), the top voice has been taken over by the ostinato figure. As a result, the top line seems to have lost its melodic capabilities. Hence, in mm. 12-13 the bottom voice assumes a melodic role, while the top voice remains frozen on F, the fourth note of the ostinato.

Measure 14 refers to the rhythm—but not the pitches—of the ostinato figure, reminding the listener of the familiar pattern while avoiding direct repetition. The ostinato returns in m. 16; here, the chromatically descending bass heard in m. 15 is suddenly interrupted by an abrupt shift away from the low register. The abrupt return to the ostinato initiates a varied reprise of previously heard material.

In order to further understand how the ostinato figure interacts with other layers of the music, it is necessary to examine tonal and modal features of this piece. From the very first measure of the piece, the ostinato suggests D as tonic: it outlines a motion from D to F, tracing the lower third of the D minor tonic triad. When the melody enters at m. 2, it becomes clear that the mode is D Aeolian. Even in the first phrase, however, (mm. 1-4), the melody does not quite seem to mesh with the ostinato figure. While the ostinato remains rooted to D as tonal center, the melody does not project a strong focus on this pitch. In fact, the melody of the first phrase lacks a clearly defined tonal orientation. The rootless melody contrasts sharply with the tonal stability of the ostinato figure.

Ostensibly in D Dorian, the second phrase (mm. 5-7) intensifies the conflict between the melody and the ostinato. Throughout this phrase, the melodic line suggests a tonal focus on A, outlining a span of a fifth from A to E in mm. 5-6, and then, in m. 7, arpeggiating an A-minor triad. The ostinato, however, remains rooted



to the pitches D-E-E-F, continuing to project D minor. The mismatch between the ostinato and the melody establishes a type of bitonal stratification, where the ostinato and melody unfold as independent layers, each with its own tonal orientation. A lower voice, occurring beneath the ostinato and the melody, presents a series of parallel triads which culminate on a plagally tinged cadence on D, reinforcing the D-centrality of the ostinato. The melodic E on the downbeat m. 7 is dissonant with its D-minor harmonization, undermining the strength of the cadence on D and creating further tension between conflicting layers. The brief melodic solo which occupies the remainder of m. 7 outlines an A minor seventh chord; in so doing, it continues to assert A as the focal pitch of the melody, in contrast to the harmonic focus on D.

The third phrase, beginning in m. 8, features an explosion of chromaticism. Prior to this phrase, the piece has been largely diatonic, with the exception of a single chromatic pitch, B-natural, in m. 5. In the third phrase, however, chromatic notes proliferate, added in an ascending circle of fifths: the first chromatic note in the piece is B-natural, the next one is F-sharp, then C-sharp and G-sharp, and then D-flat (in m. 10). The ostinato figure, however, remains constant throughout the entire phrase; stubbornly persistent, the ostinato is seemingly unaffected by the chromatic harmonies swirling around it. The conflict between the ostinato and the other layers is now more pronounced than ever: the piece has become highly chromatic, but the ostinato refuses to relinquish its diatonic focus on D.

In m. 11, however, the ostinato figure stalls out, becoming stuck on F. Has the ostinato, perhaps, been vanquished by the influx of chromaticism? In other words,

has the chromaticism “won” the conflict between stable, diatonic ostinato and unstable, modulatory harmonies? Measure 14 hints intriguingly at an answer to this question: the characteristic rhythm of the ostinato returns in this measure, but the pitch content of the ostinato is significantly altered. Instead of the diatonic figure, D-E-F, which has occurred throughout most of the piece, the ostinato rhythm is now paired with the pitches F#-C, which form a chromatic and dissonant interval. Perhaps the pervasive chromaticism of the third phrase has finally permeated the ostinato, reshaping the ostinato into a chromatic, rather than a diatonic, figure.

If the chromatic elements of the piece win out over the diatonic ostinato in the end of the third phrase, then the latter manages to regain control at the beginning of the fourth phrase, in m. 16. Indeed, m. 16 initiates a new section of the piece: a kind of varied reprise of A, this section similarly portrays a transformation from diatonicism to chromaticism. As we will see, this piece is structured in a cyclic fashion, where each cycle begins with diatonic harmony and gradually becomes more chromatic, suggesting perhaps a type of narrative in which the music attempts to escape from the tonal stasis of the ostinato figure. A conflict is thus being played out: stasis is pitted against dynamism.

Measure 16, then, begins with a return to stasis: we hear nothing but the unaccompanied ostinato at first. But by the middle of this measure, chromaticism has already begun to encroach upon the piece, counteracting the static ostinato. Following the pattern we observed previously, the chromaticism becomes increasingly more pronounced until it saturates the texture. Indeed, by m. 20 the music has become thoroughly chromatic, so much so that the previously heard

cadence on D minor (heard in m. 7) is transformed in m. 21 into a cadence on D-flat. At this point in the music, the ostinato figure becomes reduced to only two notes: just E-F instead of the usual D-E-F. Therefore, the music has become even more static. Why might the ostinato assume such terse brevity at the very moment when the music is suffused by an outpouring of chromaticism? Perhaps, to combat the dynamism and instability of the chromaticism, the ostinato becomes even more static, even more “obstinately” immobile. It is as if the ostinato is seeking to counteract the developmental energy of the other parts.

As I have argued, the ostinato in *Des pas sur la Neige* frequently clashes with other aspects of the music, creating a conflict between the static ostinato and the dynamism of the other voices. Instead of observing the conflict created by the ostinato, most scholars who discuss this piece imply that the ostinato fits with the prevailing mood of the work. In his article on *Des Pas*, Steven Rings, for instance, briefly acknowledges that “in contrast to the halting time of the ostinato, the melodic line moves steadily forward.” Here, it seems as if Rings is gesturing toward the idea of a conflict between ostinato and melody.

But he rapidly backpedals from this idea, hurriedly adding, “We should be careful, however, not to overstate any *opposition* between upper voice and ostinato...the upper line moves in loose coordination with the footsteps: the every-two-beats impulse of the ostinato is loosely maintained one beat later in the upper line. Further, the ascending third Bb-C-D in the upper part in m. 2 can be heard to

respond to the overall ascending third D-E-F in the ostinato.”<sup>412</sup> Here, Rings implies that the mismatch between the ostinato and the other voices is a minor, insignificant aspect of this work, overshadowed by the significant parallels between the ostinato and the upper voice. But, as we have seen, most of the significant events in *Des Pas* can be attributed to the conflict between the ostinato and the other voices. For instance, as I have discussed above, the ostinato is rooted on D for much of the work, whereas the other voices frequently explore different tonal centers. Hence, I believe that Rings’ analysis is flawed because he does not address the tonal mismatch between the ostinato and the other voices.

Not only have scholars tended to overlook the conflict created by the ostinato in *Des Pas*, they have also overlooked the *origin* of this ostinato. Its origin, as I have argued, derives from the French exotic toolkit. No other scholar has observed the relationship between the French exotic toolkit and *Des pas sur la Neige*. The well-known Debussy scholar Roy Howat, for example, attributes the ostinato in *Des Pas* to the influence of Indian music: “Debussy’s raga-like technique reaches a peak in the piano prelude ‘Des pas sur la Neige’ of 1909...Debussy realizes this complete cycle of modulation without leaving his home key of D minor, which is held by a simple (and somewhat Indian-sounding) ostinato drone. Again the music disguises its techniques: some harmonies, especially later in the piece, sound purely Western. But both their means of modal gestation and their accompaniment, once examined, reveal their relationships to Indian music.”<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Steven Rings, “Mystères Limpides: Time and Transformation in Debussy’s *Des pas sur la neige*,” *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 32:2 (2008): 189.

<sup>413</sup> Roy Howat, “Debussy and the Orient,” 63.

Here, Howat correctly points out that *Des Pas* sounds exotic, but he misattributes this exotic sound to the influence of Indian music. *Des Pas sur la Neige* resembles Massenet's *Hérodiade* (which, as we have seen, uses stasis and modality in a similar way) much more than it resembles Indian music. As I have argued, the exotic sound of this piece is indebted primarily to the influence of French evocations of exoticism. To be sure, Debussy and his French predecessors were exposed to actual performances of non-Western music and may well have incorporated some influence from these traditions. But many of their exotic moves are filtered through a French musical language. In fact, Howat himself admits that the influence of Indian music is hard to perceive in *Des Pas*; he attempts to explain away this difficulty by arguing that Debussy's music disguises its Indian techniques. But the relationship to the Massenet piece is much more direct, straightforward and *undisguised*. Hence, in contrast to Howat, I would argue that French, rather than Indian, music was the main inspiration for Debussy's exotic sound-world.

*Timeless Stasis in Debussy's  
La Cathédral Engloutie*

Working within the exotic tradition, but exploding its boundaries, Debussy broadens the meaning of stasis. His contemporaries such as Massenet and Saint-Saëns tended to use stasis only in exotic settings. But Debussy uses stasis to various ends. Sometimes, he uses it to evoke exoticism. But he often uses it as a purely musical technique for its own sake, and sometimes he uses it to create a

timeless, archaic sound. We see an example of the latter in his piano prelude *La Cathédral Engloutie* (1910). This work is replete with musical features that reflect the archaic spirituality of an ancient, submerged cathedral. It makes heavy use of organal textures, one of Debussy's favorite "neo-medieval" techniques. Moreover, as in many works by Debussy, drones and pedal points create extended passages of harmonic stasis, which perhaps depict the immobility of the cathedral, entombed in the sea, remote from the passage of time. As I will argue, *La Cathédral Engloutie* gestures toward a certain type of exoticism, which we might term the exotic-archaic; in other words, the temporally exotic.

The piece opens with an evocation of church bells, in mm. 1-5. But these bell-like sounds do not seem to occur in real time; an underwater cathedral would not have a functional set of church bells. The sense of distance and memory is reinforced by the melody beginning at m. 7: modal, hymn-like, and austere, this melody exudes archaism (ex. 66, mm. 1-15). Indeed, it marks the preceding bell-like passage as a voice from the past, the after-echo of bells that peal no more. Accompanied only by a pedal point on E, this hymn-like melody (mm. 7-13) is almost monophonic. The pedal point creates a static sound; this stasis adds to the sense of temporal displacement. Oddly, this static, austere passage is marked "doux et fluide." This description does not seem to suit the solemn, rhythmically monotonous character of the melody. Could this performance direction be intended as an ironic suggestion, highlighting the impossibility of playing this austere chant in a sweet, fluid manner? The melody certainly does not seem sweet or fluid; indeed, because it is monophonic—and modal—it is reminiscent of plainchant.

Profondément (Dans une brume doucement sonore)

*pp*

Doux et fluide

4

8

13

*pp*

*pp* (sans nuances)

Example 66. Claude Debussy, Preludes I, *La Cathédrale Engloutie* (1910), mm. 1-15

Regarding its modality, Richard S. Parks observes that “If ‘La cathédrale engloutie’ initially sounds Mixolydian, it is due to the emphasis on the fifth scale step at the beginning...the E pedal throughout mm. 5-13 combines with the emphasis on E and B in the melodic line and doublings to project the sound of the Lydian mode. The scale is E-(F#)-G#-A#-B-C#-D#, with E as ‘final.’”<sup>414</sup> As Parks points out here, the hymn-like melody has a pronounced Lydian color. Parks does not comment upon the extramusical connotations of this modal coloration, but I would argue that the modal inflections in the melody enhance its archaic and exotic character. That is, this passage draws upon two tropes that belong to the exotic toolkit: modality and stasis. Indeed, Parks points out that the static pedal on E imparts a Lydian flavor to this passage; without that particular pedal point, the passage might not sound Lydian at all. As Parks puts it: “The fragility of this kind of modality is apparent in mm. 47-54, where the same melody appears with the same scale, but over a pedal G#, now clearly the pure minor mode with G# functioning as tonic...the Lydian color is entirely absent.”<sup>415</sup> In other words, the static pedal point that Debussy uses in this passage helps to create modal coloration, because this pedal point reinforces the E-Lydian modality of the melody. Hence, in this passage, Debussy combines two exotic tropes, modality and stasis, allowing them to work together in meaningful ways.

The bell-like chordal texture, first heard at the outset of the piece, returns in mm. 14-15. Here, the performer is instructed to play it “without nuances,”

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<sup>414</sup> Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy*, 42.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.



underscoring the static, immobile character of the passage. Although the bell-chords themselves are not static, they unfold over a sustained tonic chord—sustained for so long, in fact, that it almost sounds like a drone. The bell therefore tolls within a static environment.

In m. 16, the music grows more animated, with quicker note-values (triplets) and more chromatic harmonies. This sense of increased motion and energy is consistent with the indication, in m. 16, “little by little rising from the fog.” But even here, Debussy uses harmonic stasis to weaken the forward momentum of the music: the bass remains on a drone of sorts for three measures (mm. 16-18); its ostinato-like pattern, glued to the fifth B-F#, makes the music seem rooted to the spot, even as the upper parts traverse distant harmonic regions. But the ostinato figure vanishes in m. 19; indeed, mm. 19-27 are not harmonically static. These eight measures project a sense of development, progress, and momentum; the music seems to be heading somewhere.

But where is the piece heading? What is the goal? The destination turns out to be yet another static chordal passage; measures 28-41 present the most static passage we have encountered thus far in this piece (ex. 67, mm. 28-41).

Underpinned by a 14-measure drone on C, the melody moves in pseudo-archaic parallel triads, played by both hands. Debussy’s use of B-flat as a ficta note, in order to avoid a tritone, highlights the medieval character of this passage. The melody concludes on C in m. 41; the bass then descends, over the course of the next few measures, from C to G#. This G# becomes a pedal point, accompanying a varied reprise of the hymn tune (the chant-like melody first heard in mm. 8-13).

Sonore sans dureté

*ff*

*8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

31

*8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

36

*8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

*8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

*8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

*8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

41

*v*

Example 67. Claude Debussy, Preludes I, *La Cathédrale Engloutie* (1910), mm. 28-41

In the final section of the piece (mm. 72-83), the melody first heard in mm. 28-41 is reprised, in an even more static setting (ex. 68, mm. 70-83). In mm. 28-41, the melody was doubled in both hands, which lent greater prominence to the melody than to the drone. But in mm. 72-83, only the right hand plays the melody; the left hand plays a recurrent ostinato figure. The melody is nearly overshadowed by the static figure in the left hand, which consists of a 12-note ostinato. Compared to the single-note drone in mm. 28-41, this static figure dominates the musical texture more powerfully, because it contains more notes and occurs more frequently. The single-note drone was struck sporadically, whereas this ostinato figure is a constant backdrop throughout the entire passage. Paradoxically, then, one could say that this piece exhibits a drive toward stasis. That is, the piece is marked by ever-increasing degrees of stasis.

### *Fêtes*

Debussy's orchestral nocturne *Fêtes* exhibits a high degree of stasis, particularly in its middle section, which features a 53-bar pedal on A-flat. The orchestration adds to the exotic effect, especially at the beginning of the section, where muted trumpets present a fanfare-like theme over an ostinato figure in the harps and timpani (ex. 69). Much of the static middle section is modal, which further enhances the exotic coloring of the music. For instance, mm. 5-12 of the middle section consistently use F-natural within a prevailing A-flat minor context, creating a Dorian sound. The combination of Dorian modality with static harmonies is typical of much French exotic music; we have already observed it in the "Danse des

70 *pp* *Flottant et sourd* *8<sup>a</sup> bassa* *au Mouv!* *pp* Comme un écho de la phrase entendue précédemment

73 *8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

76 *8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

79 *8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

82 *più pp* *8<sup>a</sup> bassa*

Example 68. Debussy, *La Cathédrale Engloutie* (1910), mm. 70-83



Example 69. Claude Debussy, *Fêtes* (1897-1899), mm. 116-131

Esclaves” from Massenet’s *Hérodiade* and the “Danse des Priestesses” from Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila*.

The A-flat Dorian phrase, lasting eight bars, is followed by a phrase in A-flat Lydian, followed (in mm. 29-32) by a return to Dorian modality. The use of a static tonal center (in this case A-flat) supporting a variety of different modes is characteristic of French exotic music; the “Danse des Esclaves” from Massenet’s *Hérodiade* also illustrates this trait, for (as we saw in Chapter 1) its melody, underpinned by a long-held pedal on G, oscillates between Dorian and Aeolian.

Thus, the shifting modality of *Fêtes*, used in tandem with long-held pedal points, is tied to the French exotic tradition.

The heavy use of exotic markers in *Fêtes* might seem to suggest that this work evokes a festival in an exotic land, perhaps a Spanish festival. But this is not the case. Debussy explicitly stated, in a 1901 letter to composer Paul Dukas, that he intended *Fêtes* as a depiction of a festival in a French park: “In fact the music of ‘Fêtes’ was based, as always, on distant memories of a festival in the Bois de Boulogne [a Parisian park].”<sup>416</sup> Thus, *Fêtes* is what I would call an unmarked piece; it is not marked as exotic. That is, *Fêtes* does not represent an exotic locale; rather, it evokes Debussy’s native land. The use of exotic markers in a French-themed work reinforces my claim that, in Debussy’s hands, exotic markers became signifiers of Frenchness. *Fêtes* is not the only work in which Debussy employed exotic markers in an explicitly French context. He also did so in *Hommage à Rameau*, to which we shall turn in the following section.

***Modality:  
Another Exotic Marker and its Absorption***

***Hommage à Rameau: Modality and Nationalism***

As we saw in Chapter 1, French exotic works often employ modal scales for picturesque effects. Debussy’s exotic works are replete with modal inflections, as are the exotic works of his predecessors such as Berlioz and Bizet. But Debussy also draws heavily on modality in unmarked works, often using it for its own sake

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<sup>416</sup> Debussy *Letters*, trans. Roger Nicholas, 117.

without explicitly exotic connotations. That is, he incorporates modal scales into his musical language. Nowhere does he do so more meaningfully than in *Hommage à Rameau*, which makes use of modal procedures within a nationalistic context. Composed in 1905 as the first movement of *Images* for piano, *Hommage à Rameau* reflects Debussy's desire to affiliate himself with the French Baroque period, and with Rameau in particular. This desire was, as discussed in Chapter 3, motivated by a felt need to counter Wagnerian influence and to promote French national traditions. Thus, nationalism (and its twin, anti-Wagnerism) forms the context for *Hommage*. Keeping this context in mind, let us examine the music itself, paying attention to the ways in which it uses modal procedures to advance a nationalistic, anti-Wagnerian agenda.

Modality permeates the musical language from the outset: *Hommage* opens with a four-bar monophonic melody, doubled at the octave (ex. 70, mm.1-11). Recitative-like in its rhythmic freedom, the melody is pointedly modal, suggesting G-sharp Aeolian (or perhaps Dorian; it is impossible to tell, since the sixth degree is absent). Underscoring the modal character of this melody, the lowered seventh scale degree (F-sharp) receives agogic emphasis in m. 1. Moreover, in m. 3 the melody outlines a minor dominant triad. The modal character of this melody, in conjunction with its monophony, evokes Gregorian chant.

Beginning in m. 5, the mode shifts to G-sharp Phrygian; the melody is stated in the upper voice, accompanied by a solemn procession of parallel chords, underlaid with a low bass pedal point. The medieval resonance of this passage is underscored by an application of *musica ficta*: Debussy naturalizes the A (leading to a Phrygian

## Hommage a Rameau

Lent et grave  
dans le style d'une Sarabande mais sans rigueur

The musical score is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of five systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The tempo and style are indicated as 'Lent et grave' and 'dans le style d'une Sarabande mais sans rigueur'. The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *p* (piano). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings. The first system (measures 1-2) features a *pp* dynamic and the instruction 'pp expressif et doucement soutenu'. The second system (measures 3-4) continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system (measures 5-6) includes a *p* dynamic and a 'piu p' marking. The fourth system (measures 7-8) shows a *p* dynamic and a 'piu p' marking. The fifth system (measures 9-11) concludes the excerpt with a *pp* dynamic. The score is characterized by its slow, expressive, and somewhat improvisatory style, typical of Debussy's 'Images'.

Example 70. Claude Debussy, Images I, *Hommage à Rameau* (1905), mm. 1-11



inflection), presumably in order to avoid the tritone, an interval forbidden in medieval music. (Debussy often employs *musica ficta* in his archaizing works; in fact, we have seen a similar use of *ficta* in *Canope* and *La Cathédrale Engloutie*).

After the decidedly archaic character of the first seven measures, the tonally functional half cadence (occurring in mm. 8-9) comes perhaps as a surprise, the tonal progression (complete with leading tones) sounding oddly out of place in this antique, modal context. This progression—V/V followed by V—is one of the most familiar, even clichéd, aspects of tonal music. But Debussy defamiliarizes it: as a disembodied fragment situated within a largely modal context, this progression is an isolated tonal gesture, divorced from the context that would make it meaningful. Indeed, the incongruity of this progression is highlighted by what follows in m. 10: a return of the opening monophonic melody, transposed to the dominant. Measure 10 therefore exudes archaism, returning as it does to the neo-Gregorian texture of the opening bars. The juxtaposition of tonal harmony with modal monophony has an alienating effect: it makes both of these styles sound wrong, out of place, incongruous.

Let us take a step back and examine exactly *how* Debussy manages to get from the tonal harmony in m.9 to the pseudo-Gregorian monophony in m.10. A fairly long rest (1 ½ beats, at a slow tempo) follows the tonally functional cadence in m. 9. This prolonged silence suggests that the music is trying to decide where to go from here; it is as if the tonally functional cadence created an *aporia*, a dead end. Indeed, one has the sense that the music has gone in a direction that is not viable, not sustainable, and it is not sure how to work its way out of this impasse. What,

then, *does* the piece manage to do, to work its way out? What it finally does is...it starts over. Measures 10-13 present a transposed restatement of the opening monophonic melody; the effect is one of backtracking, starting the piece all over again from the beginning, as the only means of escape (ex. 71, mm. 10-15).<sup>417</sup>

Example 71. Claude Debussy, Images I, *Hommage à Rameau* (1905), mm. 10-15

<sup>417</sup> For this insight, I am indebted to Steven Ring's interpretation of Debussy's *Footsteps in the Snow*. Ring persuasively calls attention to the aporetic moments and perturbing notes in *Footsteps*; although he does not discuss *Hommage*, I have noticed that some of his remarks about *Footsteps* shed light on events that occur also in *Hommage*. Ring writes, "One might detect a dissolution of the ostinato's iconic identity....This disperses not only the ostinato's iconic force but also its steady motoric drive, which had previously kept the piece moving. The music thus comes to a halt, as if unsure how to proceed." This uncertainty, I would suggest, also occurs (in a somewhat different musical context) in m. 9 of *Hommage*. See Steven Ring, "Mystères Limpides: Time and Transformation in Debussy's *Des pas sur la neige*," *19<sup>th</sup>-century Music* 32:2 (2008): 195.

But almost immediately after this fresh beginning, *Hommage* once again makes an unexpected swerve toward tonality, in mm. 13-14. The A-major chord on the last beat of m. 13 initially sounds like a Phrygian-tinged chord within a non-functional harmonic context. But in m. 14, this chord is (re)interpreted as having a tonal function: the music lands squarely on D in m. 14, creating a root progression from A to D in the bass that suggests a V-I cadence on D. Therefore, the A major chord in m. 13 is retroactively cast as V/D, a tonally functional chord. Cognitive dissonance is, once again, the result of this oscillation between non-functional modality and functional tonality: the A-major chord was initially heard within a non-functional modal context, but suddenly the listener is required to reinterpret it as having a tonal function.

This A-major chord, hovering between modality and tonality, is a troubling moment in the work which will need to be revisited and somehow dealt with—in other words, it will need to be composed-out. I use this term in the sense defined by David Code, who refers (in a study of Debussy's String Quartet) to Debussy's interest in "Beethovenian 'composing-out,' which hinges on the perturbing influence of a single pitch or interval."<sup>418</sup> In this case, it is a chord—the A-Major chord—that exerts a perturbing influence. This chord is composed-out in mm. 20-23 (ex. 72, mm.20-30), which are underpinned by a pedal on A and are, to some extent, in A major. These measures, I would argue, are a composing-out of the A-Major chord from m. 13, expanding on this chord, turning it into a temporary key

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<sup>418</sup> David J. Code, "Debussy's String Quartet in the Brussels Salon of 'La Libre Esthétique,'" *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 30:3 (2007): 265.

The musical score is for Claude Debussy's 'Hommage à Rameau' (Images I), measures 20-30. It is written for piano and consists of five systems of music. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. Dynamics include *p* (piano), *très soutenu* (very sustained), *f* (forte), *p* (piano), *più p* (even more piano), and *pp* (pianissimo). Articulations include slurs, ties, and ornaments. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. Measure numbers 20, 22, 24, 27, and 29 are marked at the beginning of their respective systems. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat signs at the end of measure 30.

Example 72. Claude Debussy, Images I, *Hommage à Rameau* (1905), mm. 20-30

area. As we discover in m. 24, the A from mm. 20-23 functions as a neighbor note (an “upper leading tone,” so to speak) to G#. Note the voice-leading in the bass in mm. 23-24: the A moves down by half-step to the tonic, G#. Measures 20-23, then, present the pitch-class A as part of a G# Phrygian scale, reintegrating this perturbing note into a modal context, in an attempt to undo its earlier, disturbingly tonal, function.

The tension between modality and tonality continues to be enacted in mm. 27-29, where a dominant-tonic chord progression occurs twice. But this is no ordinary dominant-tonic progression; it is a modal progression, in which the dominant chord is minor (containing a lowered seventh scale degree, instead of the leading tone). These progressions are therefore both tonal *and* modal at the same time: Debussy has taken the quintessential tonal cadence and given it a modal flavor. It is odd, even alienating, to hear a modal version of the quintessential *tonal* cadence; the familiar cadence is rendered strange, foreign, uncanny. While the use of the minor dominant might sound picturesque, even charmingly quaint, in some musical contexts, it has an alienating effect in the context of this particular work, a work which is in many ways “about” the incongruous juxtaposition of tonality and modality.

The final section (mm. 57-end) presents a varied return of the initial section, followed by a coda. It is of particular interest to observe how the “aporetic moment,” the tonal cadence in mm. 8-9, is recapitulated. Measures 64-65 present a (slightly altered) reprise of the music first heard in mm. 8-9 (ex. 73, mm. 62-76). Following the cadence, it sounds as if the monophonic modal melody will start up

62 *pp* *poco rit.*

65 *un peu plus lent* *p* *pp*

69 *p* *più p*

72 *retenu* *pp* *plus retenu* *pppp*

Example 73. Claude Debussy, Images I, *Hommage à Rameau* (1905), mm. 62-76

again (as it did in m. 10, following the earlier appearance of this cadence); we hear the first two notes of this monophonic melody, doubled at the octave as before. It seems that a tonic reprise is underway. But this reprise is nipped in the bud, interrupted by a C-sharp major triad, which sounds like a non sequitur. The

disorienting effect of this passage is therefore even stronger than before: in mm. 8-9, the cadence was followed by a reprise of the monophonic melody, which was itself a strange enough occurrence. But what happens now is even stranger: the monophonic melody is interrupted almost instantly, cut off by an unrelated chord. The alienation effect is even more pronounced. Following a (minor, hence modal) dominant chord in m. 71, the music cadences on the tonic. The music concludes in the Dorian mode—indeed, mm. 72-76 present a series of parallel triads, making a hushed descent through the G-sharp Dorian scale.

*Hommage à Rameau* is ostensibly a neo-Baroque piece, a work whose title would seem to suggest a stylistic tribute to the Baroque composer Rameau. But this work, as we have just seen, is replete with archaisms: monophonic chant-like passages, modality, pseudo-organel textures, *alla breve* meter, and *musica ficta*. These archaic features are *not* aspects of Rameau's musical style. Such features are associated with the medieval (and to some extent the Renaissance) period, not the Baroque. Indeed, modality, which permeates the musical language of *Hommage*, had vanished almost completely by the Baroque period (with the exception of a few sacred works, such as some Bach chorales).<sup>419</sup> The music of this period is nearly always tonal; in fact, as mentioned above, it was the Baroque composer Rameau

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<sup>419</sup> Although "historians do not agree on how and when the transition from Renaissance modal polyphony to the harmonic tonality of the Baroque occurred," nearly all musicologists agree that such a transition *did* occur, and that Baroque music is tonal, not modal. See Brian Hyer, "Tonality," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001.

who codified the system of tonal harmony.<sup>420</sup> In short, Rameau is a decidedly *tonal* composer and theorist.

Debussy was certainly aware of this fact. He knew that Rameau had written a magisterial treatise on tonal harmony; in his writings on music, he often refers approvingly to this treatise. For instance, he writes admiringly: “The need to understand—so rare among artists—was innate in Rameau. Was it not to satisfy that he wrote his *Traité de l’harmonie*, where he claimed to rediscover the ‘laws of reason,’ and desired that the order and clarity of geometry should reign in music? One can read in the preface to that same treatise that ‘music is a science bound by certain rules,’ but that these rules must be based on a general principle that can never be known unless we enlist the aid of mathematics....He put it all down in words, and traced the paths along which modern harmony was going to progress, including his own.”<sup>421</sup> This passage shows that Debussy knew, and admired, Rameau’s seminal treatise on tonal harmony; in other words, he was well aware of Rameau’s influential position as the father of tonal theory.

Why, then, would he draw so heavily on modal harmonies in a work written in honor of the man who founded tonal theory? Why didn’t he write a *tonal* tribute to Rameau? In response to this question, I argue that, in *Hommage*, modality performs at least three functions, all of which are nationalistically inflected. In what follows, I discuss each role: nostalgia, Catholicism, and exoticism. In discussing the role of exoticism, I expand the discussion beyond a specific

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<sup>420</sup> Thomas Christensen writes, “With the exception of a few pockets of conservatism in ecclesiastical circles, the modal system had largely died out by Rameau’s day.” *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170.

<sup>421</sup> François Lesure, ed., *Debussy on Music*, 254-55.



consideration of *Hommage*, moving into a broader exploration of what exoticism meant to Debussy.

### *Nostalgia*

In this section, I will argue that modality in *Hommage* symbolizes Debussy's nostalgic fixation on Rameau, therefore signifying his nationalistic longing for a premodern era. Let me take several steps back and explain how I have arrived at this conclusion.

I would argue that modality, in *Hommage à Rameau*, symbolizes tonality. Modality is an obsolete system; it is extinct, archaic; in brief, it is outmoded (as it were). To be sure, many early 20<sup>th</sup>-century composers (including Debussy) incorporated modality into their music; but what they incorporated was *neo*-modality, not the medieval form of modality (with, for example, the distinctions between authentic and plagal modes). Therefore, modality (at least as it was used in the medieval era) is an extinct system that will probably never be resurrected.

But by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, tonality was also rapidly becoming an extinct system—or so it seemed to many composers at the time. Arnold Schoenberg, for example, believed that tonality was no longer viable. He accorded Debussy a central role in the dissolution of tonality: “His [Debussy's] harmonies, without constructive meaning, often served the colouristic purpose of expressing moods and pictures...In this way, tonality was already dethroned in practice, if not in theory.”

<sup>422</sup> This passage reflects Schoenberg's belief that tonality had grown gradually weaker until it finally disappeared altogether; for Schoenberg, Debussy was one of the "dethroners" of tonality.

By using modality in *Hommage à Rameau*, I argue that Debussy is in effect saying, "Tonality, the system codified by Rameau, is becoming obsolete—indeed, it is almost as obsolete as modality! Therefore, I'll link Rameau with modality." In other words, Debussy suggests that tonality is taking on the characteristics of modality: like modality, tonality is a bygone system that is no longer viable as an organizing principle. Put another way: modality, in *Hommage à Rameau*, symbolizes tonality.

Such comparisons between tonality and modality were not unheard of in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Webern, for example, likened the disappearance of tonality to the disappearance of modality: "Just as the church modes disappeared and gave way to only two modes, so these two have also disappeared and made way for a single series: the chromatic scale. Relation to a keynote—tonality—has been lost."<sup>423</sup> Here, Webern presents an evolutionary narrative, where modality gives way to tonality, and tonality itself eventually gives way to a new system. Modality and tonality are, for Webern, linked by virtue of their shared fate: both were destined to become obsolete.

The ancient modes thus lend a nostalgic, archaic aura to *Hommage*, casting its dedicatee as an obsolete relic of a golden age. This nostalgic tone, combined with

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<sup>422</sup> Leonard Stein, ed. *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 216.

<sup>423</sup> Anton Webern, "The Death of Tonality," in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (New York: Schirmer, 1984), 433.

Debussy's many nostalgic paeans to Rameau, suggest that Debussy—often seen as an arch-modernist—had a conservative streak. I would even go so far as to argue that Debussy was ambivalent about the impending dissolution of tonality. To be sure, he hastened this dissolution through his own musical innovations. Indeed, Debussy's departure from tonal conventions has been the focus of much scholarly attention; numerous scholars have observed the inadequacy of tonal theory as an analytical tool for Debussy's music. Parks, for instance, writes, "Many characteristics of common-practice tonality so eloquently revealed in Schenkerian theory simply are not to be found in Debussy's music....We look in vain for many of the features that contribute to structure and cohesion in the music of Debussy's immediate and more distant antecedents....Two interrelated features that mark Debussy's departure from the tonal models of his predecessors are his use of chromaticism and of harmonic sonority for its own sake."<sup>424</sup> Here, Parks points out what (as we saw above) was observed already by Schoenberg in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: Debussy's harmonies are often coloristic rather than functional. It is thus indisputable that Debussy participated in the "dethroning" of tonality (to borrow Schoenberg's term). But I would argue that Debussy nonetheless harbored a nostalgic longing for an earlier era, the golden era of tonality, as epitomized by Rameau—the very man who had codified the vanishing system of tonality.

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<sup>424</sup> Richard Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 4.

### *Catholicism*

Modality was linked to Catholicism in Debussy's France. Catholicism, unlike any other Christian denomination, featured a modal repertoire of liturgical music. Most Latin countries (France, Spain, Italy) were predominantly Catholic, whereas Germany was mainly Protestant. Therefore, modality was part of French religious culture, but it was absent from *German* religious culture. Hence, modality could potentially signify the French religious tradition, a sign of France's uniqueness and difference from Germany.

In his *Dogmes Musicaux*, written between 1904-1907, music theorist Jean Huré explicitly links modality with French liturgical (and folk) music:

Dans les pays où l'on cultive les religions luthériennes et calvinistes, les modes ecclésiastiques sont absolument oubliés, que l'on n'en trouve pas trace dans les chants populaires, insipides mélodies symétriques, sur les modes, majeur ou mineur (avec sensible) et sous-entendant toujours de banales harmonies qui répètent à satiété les trois accords tonaux. (1) Les chants populaires de France, de certaines parties de l'Espagne et même de l'Italie, sont très souvent bâtis sur des modes Grégoriens.<sup>425</sup>

In this passage, Huré argues that modality is part of Latin musical cultures, and is largely absent from German musical tradition (because Germany is a Lutheran country). Huré even suggests that France is superior to Germany, because France has preserved a rich modal tradition, whereas Germany has lost touch with this tradition. Thus, for Huré, many German songs are based on dull, predictable tonal

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<sup>425</sup> In the countries where the Lutheran and Calvinist religions are practiced, the ecclesiastical modes are absolutely forgotten, so that one finds no trace of them in the popular songs, with their insipid symmetrical melodies, in major or minor keys (with leading tone) and filled with banal harmonies, excessively repeating the three tonal chords. The popular songs of France, of certain parts of Spain and even of Italy, are very frequently based on the Gregorian modes." Jean Huré, *Dogmes Musicaux* (Paris: Monde Musical, 1904-1907), 182. (Translation my own.)

harmonies, whereas (he implies) French songs are often modal and are therefore much more interesting and imaginative. Hence, Huré values modality as a symbol of French musical superiority.

Huré was not the only French musician to perceive modality as a potential source of national pride. Indeed, Laloy himself—one of Debussy’s most vocal defenders—praised Debussy’s opera *Pélleas* for its Gallic modality. With respect to the opening four bars of this opera, which are pointedly archaic and modal, Laloy writes:

It sufficed for him [Debussy] to look within himself: the soul of our ancestors was reawakened, and along with it the memory of their songs. That may be the reason why this music, which is so moving to us who have not denied our ancient liturgy, has some difficulty in opening up a path through a spirit which has been touched by the Reformation and informed by the Lutheran chorale.<sup>426</sup>

As Barbara Kelly observes, “Laloy seems to be championing the opera’s distinctively French character by pitting nominally Catholic France against mainly Protestant Germany.”<sup>427</sup> But Laloy is also voicing a familiar trope in this passage: the idea of overthrowing German influence, and rediscovering French musical traditions. In this passage, Laloy links German influence with the Lutheran reformation, and he links French tradition with the modality of Gregorian chant (which he possessively refers to as “our” ancient liturgy). He implies that Protestant Germany ignored Gregorian chant in favor of a (tonal) body of liturgical

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<sup>426</sup> Quoted in Barbara L. Kelly, “The Making of a *Musicien Français*: Pélleas, the Press, and World War I,” *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870-1939*, ed. Barbara L. Kelly (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 62.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

music; consequently, he suggests that Debussy is reviving a French musical style that was almost obliterated by the German reformation.

As Huré and Laloy suggest, Gregorian chant was widely perceived as a French body of music; indeed, during Debussy's time, plainchant was undergoing a thorough revival in fin-de-siècle France. This revival was motivated by musical nationalism. As Taruskin argues, "the new discourse of French purity had been applied by the founders of the Schola Cantorum— Charles Bordes, Alexandre Guilmant and d'Indy – to the most venerable of all Western musics, the Gregorian chant, just then being resurrected by the Benedictines of Solesmes."<sup>428</sup> Therefore, "in laying claim to this body of music," French composers had "license to employ pentatonic or 'modal' melodies in the name of France." Furthermore, as Taruskin points out, "Gregorian chant exemplified 'latinate classicism', another universalized discourse that could serve as a locus of covert nationalism." Therefore, modality—associated with the putative French tradition of Gregorian chant—became a sign of French classicism. Therefore, by using modality in *Hommage*, Debussy underscores the Frenchness of this work, linking it to the uniquely Latin, non-German, tradition of modal music.

### ***Exoticism and French National Tradition***

In addition to its nostalgic and religious connotations, modality also had an *exotic* connotation; this connotation is the most germane to my thesis. By using modality, an exotic marker, in a musical tribute to France (via the figure of

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<sup>428</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Nationalism," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001.

Rameau), Debussy is explicitly linking exoticism with Frenchness. That is, he is using an exotic marker in an overtly French context; in so doing, he highlights the French exotic tradition and his role in it. By tying the French Baroque tradition (referenced in the title) to the French exotic tradition (referenced in the music itself), he implicitly links the two traditions together, uniting them under the banner of musical Frenchness—and styling himself as an heir to these venerable traditions.

*String Quartet No. 1*

*Hommage à Rameau* was not Debussy's first exploration of modal techniques within a nationalistic context. Thirteen years earlier, in 1892, he composed a string quartet for the Société Nationale, an organization with an explicitly nationalistic agenda. Let us examine the ways in which this quartet was shaped by the nationalistic society for which it was composed.

Here, as in *Hommage*, modality plays an important structural role; in fact, the opening theme (mm. 1-10) is in G Phrygian (ex. 74). Interestingly, Debussy manages to integrate some functional harmonic progressions into a Phrygian context; the first chord in m. 1 is a tonic chord, followed by a “dominant seventh” chord on the second beat. I put “dominant” in quotation marks because, in the Phrygian mode, the dominant seventh chord is actually a half-diminished seventh chord. Debussy's voicing of this chord emphasizes its Phrygian aspects. The F and Ab in this chord, the two notes that distinguish G Phrygian from a tonal G minor, are in the outer voices, which makes them more aurally prominent.

# QUARTET IN G MINOR, Op. 10

# I

Animé et très décidé 63, 1

1<sup>er</sup> Violon

2<sup>d</sup> Violon

Alto

Violoncelle

This musical score is for a string ensemble consisting of two Violins, an Alto, and a Cello. The music is written in 2/4 time and begins with a forte (f) dynamic. The first Violin part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the second Violin, Alto, and Cello parts provide harmonic support with similar rhythmic patterns. The score is divided into four measures, with the final measure ending with a double bar line and repeat dots.

A musical score for the song "The Rose Tree" in 3/4 time. The score is written for four staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Bass 1, and Bass 2. The melody is primarily in the Treble 1 staff. The lyrics "The Rose Tree" are written below the Bass 1 staff. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "dim." (diminuendo). The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

[illegible]

Example 74. Claude Debussy, *Quartet in G Minor* (1893), mm. 1-13



Another significant aspect of this work is its use of neighbor-note triplet figures that rises a step (or sometimes a half step) and then returns to the original note. This figure occurs several times in the main theme; for instance, it occurs in mm. 1, 5, 6, 7 8, and 9. This particular figure, sometimes called a triplet turn, is a signifier of Spanish style, especially when used in conjunction with the Phrygian mode, which is also associated with Spain. In fact, Christiane le Bordays “characterizes the ‘Spanish’ style by means of a catalog consisting largely of melodic formulas—Phrygian cadences, triplet turns, and other embellishments.”<sup>429</sup> Matthew Brown points out that “Spanish music tends to have strong modal qualities; minor modes, such as Dorian or Phrygian, are particularly common.” He also observes that Debussy’s Spanish-themed songs “Seguidille and Chanson Espagnole contain a cascade of triplet turns. According to David Cox, this formula is perhaps the most...overworked Spanish melodic cliché.”<sup>430</sup> Indeed, a quick perusal of some Spanish-themed musical works yields a veritable flood of triplet turns: Chabrier’s *España*; Ravel’s *Alborada del Gracioso*; Habanera from *Carmen*; Seguidilla from *Carmen*; Debussy’s *Iberia*.

Debussy’s “Spanish” theme, stated at the outset of the first movement, acts as a unifying element; indeed, it recurs cyclically in various guises throughout the course of the entire multi-movement work. That is, this work is in cyclic form; its principal theme recurs on numerous occasions in all four movements.

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<sup>429</sup> Parakilas, *How Spain Got a Soul*, 142.

<sup>430</sup> Brown, *Debussy’s Iberia*, 41.

By using an exotically coded theme as the focus of his cyclic structure, Debussy accords exoticism a significant structural role in the cyclical unfolding of this multi-movement piece. To be sure, the theme is not always presented in a modal context; at times it is reharmonized in a tonal fashion (ex. 75). But the initial occurrence of the theme is modal, as are many of the subsequent iterations of this theme. Therefore, this cyclical work is organized around a modally inflected theme; far from using modality as decorative local color, Debussy incorporates it into the structural fabric of this work.

The musical score for Example 75, Claude Debussy's *Quartet in G Minor* (1893), measures 25-31, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 25-28) features four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The dynamics are marked as *dim.*, *più dim.*, and *p*. A boxed '1' is placed above the first staff at measure 26. The second system (measures 29-31) continues the piece, with dynamics marked as *pp* and *p*.

Example 75. Claude Debussy, *Quartet in G Minor* (1893), mm. 25-31

Through his use of modality and musical Spanishisms, Debussy signals his participation in the French national tradition of exoticism, thus linking his work to the nationalistic goals of the Société Nationale. The cyclic structure of the work amplifies the nationalistic message, for cyclic form is (as previously mentioned) a hallmark of French musical style and thus a signifier of musical Frenchness. Indeed, by 1892 cyclic form had become a potent symbol of the French tradition. By incorporating exotic scales into a cyclic structure, Debussy unites two French traditions—exoticism and cyclicity, signaling his bid for recognition as a self-consciously *French* composer.

### ***Conclusion***

I believe that this dissertation makes a significant contribution to the study of French music, particularly the study of Debussy's works and prose writings. I have shed new light on the formative influences on Debussy's style, through my analysis of the ways in which his music was heavily influenced by the French tradition of exoticism—an influence mediated through Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner*, as I have argued. Moreover, I demonstrate the interrelationship between nationalism and exoticism in fin-de-siecle French musical culture and for Debussy in particular.

It is my hope that this project will have significant implications for future scholarship. My dissertation lays the groundwork for a thorough study of the reception of Debussy's use of exoticism—something beyond the scope of this current project, and I hope that scholars advance my work by exploring this issue, through questions such as: How was Debussy's exoticism received during his

lifetime? Did music critics of the time perceive his music as tied to the French exotic tradition? Or did the novelty of his music prevent his contemporaries from hearing its connections to the French tradition? How (if at all) did Debussy's use of exoticism influence French composers of the next few generations?

Finally, my dissertation has significant implications for French music studies in general, for I hope to have introduced Nietzsche into this field. I have attempted to demonstrate that Nietzsche shaped many facets of fin-de-siecle French musical culture. As I have shown, many music journals of the time period cite Nietzsche's influence on contemporary French composers. Moreover, Nietzsche's dictum even influenced French views of music history. As we have seen, some French musicologists referred to past repertoire—medieval Spanish music and Gluck's opera *Alceste*—in Nietzschean terms. Thus, the current musical scene and certain slices of music history came to be viewed through a Nietzschean lens.

I hope that scholars extend my work by examining Nietzsche's influence on other French composers such as Ravel, Saint-Saens and Deodat de Severac. Moreover, I hope that, by integrating Nietzsche into French music studies, I will succeed in making French music more central to musicology. By elucidating some of the philosophical underpinnings of fin-de-siecle French music, I believe that I have helped to draw attention to the richness and complexity of this repertoire.

In fact, some other scholars have also begun to explore the relationships between fin-de-siecle French music and various philosophical movements. As we saw in our discussion of *Faune*, Jessica Wiskus demonstrates resonances between Debussy's music and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy, particularly with regard

to Debussy's treatment of variation, repetition and temporality: "The *Prelude* never presents an idea all at once, complete and set apart....As Merleau-Ponty likewise says of the institution of a philosophical idea, these variations rather serve 'to make it say what at first it had not quite said.'"<sup>431</sup> Wiskus' discussion of Merleau-Ponty proves fruitful for our understanding of Debussy's variation techniques.

Perhaps the introduction of Nietzsche into French music studies will prove equally fruitful. Maybe a Nietzschean perspective on French music will even stimulate interest in long-forgotten French composers such as Laparra, who were once popular but have now lapsed into obscurity. Samuel Llano has already taken a step in this direction. Examining Laparra's engagement with French discourses of exoticism and nationalism, he regards Laparra's opera Spanish-themed opera *La Jota* "as an essay on the problems that affected French society at the time of its composition, as well as Laparra's personal contribution to the nation-building processes in the form of a reflection on France's relations with one of its Others."<sup>432</sup>

As a French composer of Spanish ancestry, Laparra was in an advantageous position to reflect upon these issues. Laparra also contributed to the French interest in Nietzsche's musical aesthetics. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Lichtenberger (*Revue Musicale*, 1910) links Laparra's Spanish-flavored music to Nietzsche's dictum. I hope that scholars will analyze the (faux?) Hispanic markers in Laparra's music, to provide further insight into the musical styles that arose in response to Nietzsche's dictum.

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<sup>431</sup> Wiskus, *The Rhythm of Thought*, 109.

<sup>432</sup> Llano, *Whose Spain*, 100.

In sum, then, I believe that my project offers new insight into a nationalistically charged moment in French musical culture—a moment in which French composers were desperately seeking to escape the long shadow of Wagner and to redefine musical Frenchness. It was at this moment, in the throes of a reaction against German music, that Debussy—inspired by Nietzsche’s impassioned polemic-- mobilized the French tradition of exoticism as an anti-Wagnerian strategy. In deploying exoticism as a nationalistic weapon against Wagner, Debussy joins the three strands that run through my dissertation: exoticism, nationalism, and anti-Wagnerism.

### Important dates

1798-1801—Napoleon undertakes a campaign in Egypt and Syria, leading a group of French military forces called “Armée d’Orient.” Napoleon was attempting to defeat Great Britain, a rival colonial power.

1813—Birth of Wagner in Leipzig, Germany

1829—The French writer Victor Hugo publishes his influential collection of Orientalist poetry, *Les Orientales*. In the preface, he writes, “The Orient, as image or as thought, has become...a sort of general preoccupation.”<sup>433</sup>

1830-48—French conquest of Algeria

1833-35—French composer Félicien David spends two years in Egypt

1844—David composes his extremely influential *Le Désert*, an exotic portrayal of Egypt

1862—Birth of Debussy in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

1865—Wagner composes *Tristan und Isolde*

1870—Franco-Prussian war begins

January 1871—Germany wins the Franco-Prussian war

February 1871—In the wake of France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, the *Société Nationale de Musique* is founded to promote French music

1872—Debussy enters the Paris Conservatory. He studies there for the next eleven years.

1873—The Paris Conservatory museum acquires 105 non-European instruments. This museum probably exerted an early influence on Debussy’s interest in exoticism.

1875—Premiere of Bizet’s *Carmen* at the *Opéra-Comique* in Paris

1876—Wagner’s *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth opens

1882—Premiere of Wagner’s *Parsifal* at Bayreuth

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<sup>433</sup> Quoted in Susan McClary, *Carmen*, 30.

1883—Death of Wagner

1888—Nietzsche writes *Case of Wagner*

1889—World's Fair in Paris. Much non-Western music is performed, including gamelan music

1893—Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner* is translated into French

1893—Debussy writes that he is trying to purge Wagner from his opera *Pelleas et Melisande*<sup>434</sup>

1894—Debussy composes *Prélude À L'après-midi d'un Faune*, his first major work on an exotic/Mediterranean theme

1895—A group of French composers, including Debussy, start working on a critical edition of Rameau's complete works

1900—France is the second largest colonial power in the world (second only to Great Britain)<sup>435</sup>

1900—Paris hosts another World's Fair, once again featuring non-Western music

January-March 1903: The journal *Mercure de France* features a full-page advertisement for a French translation of Nietzsche's complete works

1903—Debussy mentions Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner* in a music review<sup>436</sup>

1903—French music critic Lionel de La Laurencie writes, "We [French composers] are in the process of following Nietzsche's advice and 'mediterraneanizing' music."<sup>437</sup>

1903—This year marks the beginning of Debussy's focus on Spanish music, with *La Soirée dans Grenade*. Other Spanish pieces soon followed, including *Iberia* (1905-1908) and *Puerta del Vino* (1912-13).

1903—Debussy's interest in exoticism reaches beyond Spanish music. The same year as *Soirée*, he also composed *Pagodes*, an evocation of the Far East.

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<sup>434</sup> Quoted in Richard Taruskin, "The First Modernist," *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 199.

<sup>435</sup> Victor T. Le Vine, *Politics in Francophone Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 36.

<sup>436</sup> François Lesure, ed., *Debussy on Music*, 161.

<sup>437</sup> Lionel de La Laurencie, "Enquête sur l'influence allemande," *Mercure de France* 45 (1903): 101-102.



1905—The French journal *Le Mercure Musical* publishes an article called “Les Idées de Nietzsche sur la Musique.”<sup>438</sup>

1908—French musicologist Louis Laloy writes about Nietzsche’s significant influence on French composers<sup>439</sup>

1908—Debussy openly criticizes Wagner in *Golliwogg’s Cakewalk*, by mockingly quoting from *Tristan und Isolde*

1913—Debussy quotes Nietzsche in his article for *Le Matin*<sup>440</sup>. The quotation, “all good things laugh,” is from Nietzsche’s book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

1914-18—World War I, during which Germany invades France

1918—Death of Debussy

1931—Rene Peter publishes a memoir about his interactions with Debussy. He describes how he and Debussy read Nietzsche’s *Case of Wagner* together (probably in the 1890’s).<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Jacques Meraly, “Les Idées de Nietzsche sur la Musique,” *Le Mercure Musical* (1905).

<sup>439</sup> “Spain exerts a singular attraction on our composers today: in the same way as Nietzsche by the ‘African’ *Carmen*, they feel themselves seduced by a burning sky, an expansive melody, dominating rhythms.” Laloy, *Louis Laloy on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky*, 254.

<sup>440</sup> Debussy, “Jeux,” *Le Matin* 15 Mai 1913, reprinted in *Claude Debussy: Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 242.

<sup>441</sup> Rene Peter, *Claude Debussy*. (Gallimard, 1931), 63.

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